University of Alberta

Around 1922

Anxiety and "Lowbrow" Culture in 1920s England

by

Karen Chow ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Department of English

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled *Around 1922: Anxiety and "Lowbrow" Culture in 1920s England* submitted by Karen Chow in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Abstract

This thesis explores the relationship between the "high art" of literary modernism and its "lowly" counterpart, popular culture, focussing on 1920s England. The huge market for "lowbrow" writing, the incredible success of marriage manuals like Marie Stopes's *Married Love* and sex novels like E.M. Hull's *The Sheik*, and the blurred gender boundaries represented by the figures of the "flapper" and the "sheik" provoked anxieties among intellectuals like D.H. Lawrence and moral guardians like James Douglas, while offering new economic and sexual freedoms for postwar women consumers.

Three chapters examine the language of degeneration, eugenics, and birth control as it was used to regulate "the masses" as well as "mass culture," popular discourses that recognized women's sexual desires as autonomous and natural, and obscenity laws that censored "highbrow" works but overlooked the "low." Popular culture threatened dominant ideologies of class, race, and gender while still adhering largely to status quo values.

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Introduction: 1922

"1922—what happened in 1922?" This was the question invariably asked of me when I told friends that I was writing this thesis. In 1922, Joyce's *Ulysses* was published, as was Eliot's *The Waste Land* (in *The Criterion*): two monuments of the English modernist avant-garde. D.H. Lawrence's *Fantasia of the Unconscious* was published in 1922. But so was Ethel M. Dell's now-forgotten "lowbrow" novel, *Charles Rex*. E.M. Hull's *The Sheik* reached its third year of bestselling success. Elinor Glyn signed a contract to film her scandalous *Three Weeks* in Hollywood. Marie Stopes's marriage manual *Married Love* was enjoying its ninth edition. Peter Carey has suggested that the intellectual elite reacted to the masses' interest in books by "making literature too difficult for them to understand" (16); in this light, I chose 1922 as the "annus mirabilis" of English literary modernism and based my exploration of popular culture around it, focussing more generally on the trends of the 1920s.

In examining the relationship between the "high art" of modernism and its "lowly" counterpart, popular culture, I have taken my sense of "highbrow" and "lowbrow" from sources contemporary to the 1920s period. The writings of Lawrence, Rebecca West, and the Woolfs; quotes from biographies of Dell and Glyn; Gilbert Frankau's anti-highbrow declarations on the radio; and cultural historian Q.D. Leavis's *Fiction and the Reading Public* inform my sense of these troublesome, always fluid, categories. "Highbrow" status was generally self-defined and did not necessarily correspond to one's economic capital but to intellectual capital (as the working-class

Lawrence exemplifies), though those who possessed money were often also better educated. The content of a work was not a good indication of its status, escaping blanket definitions of "high" and "low"; Shakespeare and Dickens, for example, had as little similarity to Joyce or Woolf as to Edgar Wallace or Ethel Dell, but were bought by the general public and accepted as "classics." "Highbrow" or "lowbrow" labels were more suitably applied to contemporary works, and tended to reflect a work's intended (and actual) audience and circulation. Who bought it? Who read it? "Highbrow" works were higher-priced and printed in smaller quantities (due partially to the need to retain an "exclusive" appeal), and were rarely in demand by the general readership in the public libraries. In contrast, "lowbrow" works appeared in cheap editions and existed ephemerally, although a bestseller could last for years on the shelf, enjoying numerous reprints and sales in the millions.

However, these are only generalizations. It is precisely the impossibility of keeping "high" and "low" as self-contained, strictly oppositional fields that caused the most anxiety in the early century. The categories are *not* self-contained, and despite the tactics of exclusion and containment deployed by intellectuals such as Lawrence, "art" continued to be created, consumed, and appropriated by the literate masses. Virginia Woolf, who was willing to accept and respect the category of "lowbrow" art, nevertheless insisted on strict distinctions between "high" and "low," rejecting any work that could not be easily identified as one or the other. Her elitism is reflected in her fear of "high" and "low" breaking out-of-bounds and her denunciation of the "middlebrow"; in a letter to the *New Statesman*, unsent and published after her death, Woolf insists that the "highbrows,

whose brows are high" and the "lowbrows, whose brows are low," are being stirred to dissent from an otherwise peaceful coexistence by the rabble-rousing middlebrows, whose "brows are betwixt and between" (198).

My thesis, then, examines the anxiety caused by the rupture of cultural categories like "high" and "low," and by popular culture's role in the blurring of class and gender boundaries in the 1920s. My first chapter, "The Emergence of Cultural Eugenics: Controlling the 'Low' in Marie Stopes's Marriage Manuals and D.H. Lawrence's *Fantasia of the Unconscious*," explores the way in which the language of eugenics and birth control was used in reference to the regulation of "undesirable" people as well as the "undesirable" culture of the masses, focussing on the work of two self-defined "prophets," Stopes and Lawrence. My second chapter, "The Significance of Popular Sexual Knowledges for Women's Agency: Marie Stopes's *Married Love* and E.M. Hull's *The Sheik*," looks at how women's role in the creation and consumption of popular sex-novels and films threatened traditional ideas of femininity and masculinity, and reflected the new sexual knowledges espoused by Stopes that presented women's sexual desires as autonomous and natural. My third chapter, "Battling 'Pornocracy': Censorship and the Obscene Novel in the 1920s," examines the suppression of works deemed threatening to public morality and tries to find reasons for why highbrow works like *Ulysses* tended to face *legal* censorship, while lowbrow "sex novels," though sometimes banned in schools and just as viciously denounced, did not. In all three chapters I have tried to show how popular culture and popular discourses of sexuality threatened dominant ideologies of class, race, and gender while still adhering, for the most part, to status quo values.

1

The Emergence of Cultural Eugenics: Controlling the "Low" in Marie Stopes's Marriage Manuals and D.H. Lawrence's *Fantasia of the Unconscious*

By the 1920s the anxiety felt by British intellectuals that mass literacy would lead to the destruction of highbrow culture was deeply rooted. The Education Act of 1870 had established a new "lowbrow" reading public among the poorer and working classes, and England's improved economy following World War One meant that many people, enjoying an elevated standard of living and increased disposable income, bought books who could not previously afford them.[1] Their demand created a huge market for lower-brow reading material that extended beyond mass-circulated daily newspapers like the *Daily Mail* (from 1896) and the *Daily Express* (from 1900).

Evidence that reading and writing were less than ever the property of the elite, particularly the male elite, came in the form of cheaply produced, cheaply priced "bestseller" novels, in "sex novels" that directly represented women's sexuality, and in weekly working-women's story papers and fiction magazines like *Peg's Paper* (1919), *Polly's Paper* (1919), and *Ivy Stories* (1922).[2] Books offering instruction in writing

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[1] Before 1870, the popular fiction market consisted mainly of yellow-backs and penny-dreadfuls, "classic" novels and triple-volume sensation novels. The triple-volume format gave way to the cheaper, one-volume, six-shilling novel in the 1890s. By the 1920s, cheap editions in paper covers cost as little as six or seven pence. See Joseph McAleer, *Popular Reading and Publishing in Britain, 1914–1950*, 12–70.

[2] See Cynthia White's *Women's Magazines: 1693–1968* and especially Billie Melman's *Women and the Popular Imagination in the Twenties: Flappers and Nymphs* for discussions of women's weeklies. Also see Irene Dancyger's *A World of Women: An Illustrated History of Women's Magazines* for visual reproductions of covers and pages from such magazines.

commercial fiction blurred boundaries between reader and writer; romantic novelist Elinor Glyn, in her two-volume *Elinor Glyn System of Writing* (1922), told her readers that "Anyone, anywhere is welcome to the profession" and dispels the "mistaken idea…that you had to have a special knack in order to write…happily this notion is now a thing of the past" (qtd. in Melman 108).[3] In the eyes of the British avant-garde, mandatory education had created a monster: a fertile, self-perpetuating mass of bad art. As John Carey has elaborated in *The Intellectuals and the Masses* (1992), perhaps too generally, the reactions of writers such as Virginia Woolf, T.S. Eliot,[4] W.B. Yeats, and D.H. Lawrence to the "masses" and to mass-produced culture were antagonistic and derisive, if not downright hostile.

The perceived threat to high culture reflected a broader fear that had risen among the middle to upper classes from the mid-nineteenth century, a fear that was evident in the theories of French psychiatrist Bénédict Augustin Morel and in the work of zoologist Edwin Ray Lankester, and which peaked with German critic Max Nordau's *Entartung* (1892) at the fin de siècle: Was the human race "degenerating"?[5] "Degeneracy" was viewed as a biological, pathological condition that afflicted populations in primarily

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[3] Other examples of instructive material include Michael Joseph's *Short Story Writing for Profit*, *Journalism for Profit*, *The Commercial Side of Literature*, *How to Write Serial Fiction*, and *The Magazine Story* (1922–1925), George G. Magnus's *How to Write Saleable Fiction* (1904, 14th ed. 1924), and the *Bookman*'s series of advice for writers (March to August issues, 1922). See Melman 108 and Leavis 27–31.

[4] See David Chinitz, "T.S. Eliot and the Cultural Divide," for a discussion of Eliot's sympathies with popular culture.

[5] For a fuller explanation of degeneration theory, see my sources: William Greenslade's *Degeneration, Culture and the Novel* and David Trotter's *The English Novel in History 1895–1920*.

urban areas, a cause rather than an effect of crime, disease and poverty. Morel believed it was symptomized by deformity, perversity, and emotional disturbance and that it was, more importantly, inheritable, posing a menace to the future of the race as it manifested itself in worsening degrees from one generation to the next. "Degenerate types" such as "the urban poor, prostitutes, criminals, and the insane" (Nancy Stepan, qtd. in Greenslade 22) were thought to possess identifiable physical characteristics, and "criminal anthropologists" such as Caesar Lombroso worked to identify "deviant" people according to physiognomy. Any social "problem" could be blamed on degeneracy: "poor standard of health among army recruits…the falling birth rate, the decline of the rural population and the prevalence of alcoholism and nervous exhaustion," even suffrage (Trotter 114).

Moreover, the human race was in danger of "devolving." Since the publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* in 1859, the biological language of evolution had been appropriated to describe various social processes, and terms such as "evolution," "fitness," "selection," and "parasitism" were used by Social Darwinist critics to explain the sorry state of society in England. Darwin and his followers had realized that "evolution" did not necessarily mean "progress," and Lankester's *Degeneration: A Chapter in Darwinism* (1880) made the argument that some organisms, rather than becoming more complex over many generations, actually become adapted to "'less varied and less complex conditions of life' where 'its food and safety (are) very easily obtained'" (qtd. in Greenslade 32). The result was that these organisms, failing to "take up the challenge of the struggle for existence (as the Eloi failed in H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine*)," would decline into simplicity and parasitism (Greenslade 32).

The biological imagery used to characterize the "unfit" sectors of the population distanced and relegated them to the realm of scientific specimens under scrutiny, but this neat containment would be threatened by the emergence of the differential birthrate. It is obvious that the discourses of degeneracy at the fin de siècle supported dominant ideologies of class rule and colonialism by categorizing and, in the process, excluding "deviants" such as nonwhite "races" and the lower classes from acceptable society, forming hierarchical polarities that separated high from low in class, race, and gender; miscegenation occurring across this constructed rift could lead to the "spread" of degeneracy. Certainly, classism and racism were not new to post-Darwinian England, but what was different was that the authors of the discourse—sociologists, scientists, intellectuals, professionals—were faced, for the first time, with the fact that the lesser-fit populations were reproducing more quickly than the "fit"; quantity might triumph over quality.

By the early twentieth century, lowbrow *culture* would be viewed by highbrow intellectuals with the same alarm, as a growing mass that needed to be curbed; what David Trotter refers to as the "biologizing of social theory" (114) could also be applied to cultural theory. Leonard Woolf, in his pseudoscientific, pseudo-Darwinist *Hunting the Highbrow* (1928), pokes fun at the obsessive biologization of class differences and the use of Darwinian terms by positioning himself as a "scientific natural historian" who studies the behavior of both highbrow intellectuals and consumers of lowbrow culture. Woolf proposes to call his paper "Notes on the Natural History of the Highbrow and on the Reasons for Hunting Him," and offers two "genus" categorizations (five "species"

altogether, with variations) for the cultural highbrow: "*Altifrons altifrontissimus*," "*Altifrons aestheticus*," "*Altifrons frankauensis*," "*Pseudaltifrons intellectualis*," and "*Pseudaltifrons aestheticus*."

Woolf wrote his book in response to the backlash against highbrow snobbery, a backlash which he characterized as a "huntdown" of intellectuals by popular writers who were smugly proclaiming the superiority of lowbrow literature on their own cultural territory, the newspapers and the radio.[6] The debate between high and low had by this time ceased to be the exclusive property of sociologists and cultural theorists. Woolf notes that the media presented the lowbrow as "better"—"more honest, and clean, and happy, and wise, and *English*" (5). In particular, popular novelist Gilbert Frankau's attack on the highbrow, aired in a radio broadcast entitled "An Author's Feelings on Publication Day" and then publicized in the press, appealed to patriotic pride and majority values, using the nationalistic rhetoric of duty and honor and passing value

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[6] The BBC (British Broadcasting Company, later Corporation), from which Gilbert Frankau often made his denouncements of the highbrow (Melman 43), began daily broadcasts from Marconi House in London in 1922. In an undated, unsent letter to the *New Statesman* that characterizes highbrows as "incapable" of "dealing with real life" and the lowbrow as "a man or woman of thoroughbred vitality who rides his body in pursuit of a living at a gallop across life" ("Middlebrow"197), Virginia Woolf insists that it is really the "middlebrow" that causes disharmony between the otherwise peacefully co-existent, complementary sides. Woolf writes, "we are told—the air buzzes with it day and night, the Press booms with it by day…'Highbrows hate lowbrows! Lowbrows hate highbrow!'—when highbrows need lowbrows, when lowbrows need highbrows, when they cannot exist apart…. Who has set this malicious gossip afloat?… It is the doing of the middlebrows" (198). She criticizes the BBC for not recognizing that the true enemy is the middlebrow writer: "If the B.B.C. stood for anything but the Betwixt and Between Club they would use their control of the air not to stir strife between brothers, but to broadcast the fact that highbrows and lowbrows must band together to exterminate a pest which is the bane of all thinking and living" (202). It is possible that she had Frankau, among others, in mind. Her letter, along with the Woolfs' publication of Leonard's *Hunting the Highbrow* in 1927, shows that both Woolfs accorded some importance to the highbrow/lowbrow debate in the media. Virginia may have felt more protective of her highbrow status; her letter had been written to the *New Statesman* in response to a review that "omitted to use the word Highbrow" (196) in reference to herself. The letter ends, "If any human being, man, woman, dog, cat, or half-crushed worm dares call me 'middlebrow' I will take my pen and stab him, dead" (203).

judgements on culture. Frankau generalizes:

> Highbrows, you see, are a funny people. They do not believe there is any good in the great heart of the British public. They consider that the book or play or picture which entertains and educates and pleases and uplifts ninety people out of every hundred cannot possibly have any real artistic merit. They—the highbrows—think that literature is an exclusive thing—rather like one of those ugly statues, or still uglier pictures, which they are always telling us we ought to admire. But such beliefs are not mine. In fact, I am positive that if an author has a really good story to tell, and really interesting characters to put in it, and really interesting scenes to depict, it is his bounden duty to write his tale in such a way that it is comprehensible and entertaining and uplifting to the vast majority of his fellow-countrymen and countrywomen. (qtd. in Woolf 6–7)

Certainly, *Ulysses* (1922) and *The Waste Land* (1922) would have failed Frankau's criteria for "fine books," but the examples he does give reflect an interesting distinction between "highbrow" and "classic" literature:

> A fine book must be the common property of all who can read. And I am quite sure that Homer and Virgil and Dante and Shakespeare and Charles Dickens—just to name a few of the world's greatest story-tellers—did not write for any little clique or for any highbrow, but straight to the hearts of the majority of the people who could either read or listen to them in their day. (7–8)

Homer, Virgil, and Dante as popularly loved, popular literature? Frankau regards "fine books" as any book that he believes is read and loved by the general public. Woolf is bitingly critical, first noting that "Mr. Frankau seems to define a highbrow as anyone who does not like the novels written by Mr. Frankau" (6), and relegating an entire species of highbrow—*Altifrons frankauensis*—to those "not entertained and uplifted by the novels of Gilbert Frankau" (10). Then, he points out the intellectual flaws in Frankau's emotionally-driven polemic, noting that Frankau's examples of classics and books that "go to the heart of the nation" include books that only "highbrows" seem to understand or enjoy, such as the *Aeneid*, to which Woolf cannot attribute a good story, interesting characters, or interesting scenes:

> …here is a highbrow, who can only be understood and appreciated by highbrows and is only read by highbrows, accepted by the highbrow hunters as a classic, quoted as an example of a popular writer, and miraculously metamorphosed into a popular novelist. Surely a strange phenomenon! (17–18)

For Woolf, Frankau's apparent hypocrisy stems from his exclusive judgement of highbrow books as bad literature and classic books as good, while failing to acknowledge that the two categories are in fact conflated: many long-lived classics are also considered highbrow. "Classic" status is often conferred on highbrow texts that manage to traverse the gap from a specific, intellectual market to a general, public one.

Woolf argues that lowbrow material quickly disappears from the market, while over the long term, highbrow material becomes accepted as classic by the lowbrow that

originally so derided it. Anticipating Pierre Bourdieu's discussion of the "time-lag between cultural production and scholastic consecration" and the educational system's "slow rate of evolution" that eventually elevates certain "works into 'classics' by their inclusion in curricula" in *The Field of Cultural Production* (124), Woolf writes, "One or two or three productions, which, with difficulty, sold 1000 copies to struggle into a second edition after two or three years, will have taken firm root in the heart of the ordinary man, so that at the end of fifty years they are ripe for sanctification in the Temple Classics or Everyman's Library" (22–23). Once the highbrow work of art becomes commodified (occupying Bourdieu's "intermediary" area between restricted and large-scale fields of production), it begins to appeal to the lowbrow as a product with symbolic capital that everyone *recognizes* as a canonized "classic" but which no one is inclined to read; for example, Frankau's denouncements of highbrow literature would probably have included *Ulysses* and other modernist works now packaged by publishers as classics. Admirably, in his pseudoscientific assessment Woolf also criticizes the snobbery of the highbrow who only likes what is exclusive, difficult, and rare: *pseudoaltifrons intellectualis* "only likes what nobody else can understand" and *pseudaltifrons aestheticus* "only likes the latest things or oldest thing or the things which the majority dislikes," both pseudo species being "parasitic" ones "forced by struggle for social existence or distinction to mimic the true highbrow" (10–11).

In *Hunting the Highbrow*, Woolf also discusses (with tongue lodged in cheek) the rapid turnover of bestselling books in terms of population dynamics—new popular titles, he says, are published constantly and thus have a "high birthrate" (24) as compared to

highbrow books—reflecting continuing fears surrounding the "population question" in England.[7] The declining birthrate in the late 1800s had spurred general cries of "race-suicide" and pleas for women to keep producing large families in the interests of the Empire, while Neo-Malthusians, believing the birthrate was not declining quickly enough, promoted family limitation to control what they saw as an overpopulation problem. Supporters of either argument shared concerns about degeneration, "racial hygiene" (see note 12), and the quality of the future population. Further, it was believed that the "unfit" were not only refusing to die out through natural selection as a result of welfare programs, they were actually proliferating at a greater rate than the "fit." Census figures prior to the 1920s showed that the *general* birthrate had declined dramatically since the 1870s but also that the birthrate was declining *differentially*: the lower, poorer classes were reproducing more quickly than the more affluent, better-educated classes. Charles Booth's strongly degenerationist study *Life and Labour of the People of London* (research initiated 1896) showed that even population growth viewed in terms of total fertility, taking into account both birth and death rates, was higher in poorer areas (Soloway 29–30). A national *Fertility of Marriage Census* (undertaken 1911 by General Register Office superintendent of statistics T.H.C. Stevenson, statistics published 1917 with a report in 1923), confirmed fears that the lower classes would produce between 30 to 50 percent of the next generation (Soloway 40).

Many theories were given for the general drop in birthrate, though Soloway

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[7] See Richard Allen Soloway's exhaustive *Birth Control and the Population Question in England, 1877–1930*, my main source for information about the "population question." See also Roy Porter and Lesley Hall's *The Facts of Life: The Creation of Sexual Knowledge in Britain, 1650–1950*.

emphasizes that deliberate "family limitation," or birth control, was, by the 1920s, perceived as the true culprit:

> It was eventually conceded that the decline in the birthrate, whether a menacing or salutary trend, was not a consequence of Darwinian evolution, cyclical dietary fluctuations, radical alterations in the age and frequency of marriage, or the sterilizing effects of industrialization and urbanization. On the contrary it was, as Robertson and countless others knew full well, a direct result of the rapid adoption of family limitation, or birth control, as it was later described. The increasingly sophisticated interpretation of governmental and private statistical inquiries in the decade and a half preceding the war gave decisive scientific credibility to that conclusion. (Soloway 5)

Birth control had become the culprit for the differential as well, as surveys of varying representative accuracy reported. In David Heron's analysis, *On the Relation of Fertility in Man to Social Status* (1906, first of the aptly-named series "Studies in National Deterioration"), "…all of the evidence indicated that the primary reason was the adoption of restrictive practices by couples in the better sections of London rather than their later age of marriage" (Soloway 31). Sidney Webb's Fabian Society tract *The Decline in the Birth-Rate* (1907), which surveyed members or people recommended by members of the Society, had an inadvertent bias towards intellectuals and found that "limited" marriages made up the majority of their sample (Porter and Hall 183–84; Soloway 31–34). Ethel Elderton of the Galton Eugenics Laboratory, in her later, more thorough *Report on the*

English Birth-Rate (surveyed 1911; published 1914), made similar conclusions that deliberate family planning was the reason for the greater decline in birth-rate among the wealthier, better-educated and better fed "fitter elements of the population" (Soloway 40). Leonard Darwin, leader of the Eugenics Education Society, would make this belated observation to Havelock Ellis in 1920: "where we differ…is in my belief that birth limitation will not be adopted voluntarily by the inferior types of the community to nearly the same extent as with the superior types" (qtd. in Soloway 199).

Birth control may indeed have been the reason for the lower birthrate among the privileged classes, but late Victorian beliefs that intellectual activity itself caused infertility in women continued to circulate into the twentieth century. Herbert Spencer in the 1860s had claimed that mental exertion led to "diminution of reproductive power" and "absolute sterility," and that brainy, "flat-chested girls survive their high power education" but are then incapable of bearing and nursing children (qtd. in Soloway 139). Edward Clarke had said in 1873 that women who expended their energies intellectually between the ages of 12 and 30 would have underdeveloped sexual organs. Though Leonard Woolf would later poke fun at these misconceptions, saying, "not all male highbrows are impotent or female highbrows sterile" (12), many still believed that educated women were sapping limited energies from their "natural"—in fact, naturalized—function of childbirth, as an article by R. Murray Leslie in the *Eugenics Review* of April 1911–January 1912, entitled "Woman's Progress in Relation to Eugenics," illustrates.

In his article, Leslie asks, "Is woman's so-called progress—social and

intellectual—conducive to the betterment of the race?…able to keep England in its present proud position among the nations of the world?" to which the answer is clearly *no*. "All doctors, whether men or women," he says, believe it "extremely unwise during early adolescence…to overtax the physical and nervous energy of growing girls and quite young women" (288); he quotes an unnamed writer who believes it useless for girls to attend Cambridge or play hockey "if she cannot nurse her baby, or even produce one" (286). Leslie reduces the role of women to "mothers of the fittest," drawing on separate spheres theory, gender essentialism, and scientific authority throughout to promote motherhood over intellectual activity except in older, married women who have already fulfilled their reproductive duties. His tone is patronizing, and though his invocation of the modern woman as independent and active in all social and political milieux *seems* progressive, he in fact fuels the anxieties of such modern women by (and these are only two examples) correlating education with insanity (289) and stigmatizing intellectual women as unnatural and unattractive (284). In contrast, Marie Stopes's *Married Love* (1918) attempted to assuage such anxieties by asserting that intellectual activity for women could only be a benefit, not a hindrance, to marriage, motherhood, and the nation:

> "Ellen Key ('Love and Marriage')…writes as though the aspiration to do professional and intellectual work of a high order must dwarf and sterilise the mother in the married woman…I am writing of the English, the English of to-day, and though we also have among us that dwarfed and sterilized type of woman, she forms in our community a dwindling minority. The majority of our best women enter marriage and

motherhood...." (151).

Whether or not one saw a causal relationship between cerebral activity (in either sex) and infertility, the two were inextricably linked in the population question; if not physically "unfit" for motherhood, intellectual women were seen as unwilling to bear children, or, more derogatory, as unfeminine and unattractive to men, as Leslie (284) and others asserted.[8] Francis Galton, a prominent eugenicist who opposed women's education and suffrage, was not even certain such women were capable of finding mates: their "dogmatic and self-assertive" characters would repel suitors, or their "shy and peculiar" personalities would render them invisible (qtd. in Soloway 139). Eleanor Mildred Sidgwick's 1887 study of the relationship between female education and health, marriage, and fertility placed blame on men, arguing, as Soloway points out, that "only a minority of females in the educated classes ever married...not from want of physical attractiveness or desire, but from a lack of suitable men among the upper middle classes who tended to propose late, if at all"; she also asserted that "Cambridge and Oxford girls who married were...maternally more efficient," in contrast to the theories of Spencer, Galton, and others (141). Dr. Major Greenwood and Dr. Agnes Saville's study of women and contraceptive practices for the National Birth-Rate Commission (established 1913 by

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[8] See also Susan J. Leonardi's *Dangerous by Degrees: Women at Oxford and the Somerville College Novelists*. The first chapter, "'Done by Cheeseparing': Somerville College and the Degrees-for-Women Debate," discusses the women's colleges at Oxford in the early twentieth century and explores male characterizations of Oxford women as overly intellectual, dowdily dressed, and uninterested in attracting men, in short, "unfeminine in character and appearance" (a letter printed in *Oxford Magazine*, May 28, 1920, qtd. in Leonardi 27). Leonardi also observes the contradictory stereotyping of women as intellectually flimsy (but too keen), frivolous (but too studious), a threat to male community (but too cloistered in their own community), and distracting to male students (but too "prudish") (25). Oxford began to grant degrees to women in 1920; Cambridge did not award degrees to women until 1947.

the National Council of Public Morals) confirmed that a higher percentage of college women reported using limitation practices. No matter what, it is clear that until the 1920s, the educated classes were reproducing much less quickly than their "inferiors."

The fertility differential alarmed the higher brow as well as the higher classes. Even in the sterile space of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* the urban working class is sexually active and fecund:

> It's them pills I took, to bring it off, she said.
>
> (She's had five already, and nearly died of young George.)
>
> The chemist said it would be all right, but I've never been the same.
>
> You *are* a proper fool, I said.
>
> Well, if Albert won't leave you alone, there it is, I said,
>
> What you get married for if you don't want children? (496)

David Trotter, in "Modernism and Empire: Reading *The Waste Land*," also points to Eliot's familiarity with the eugenic vocabulary in "The Serious Artist" (1913), where he states, "It is a crime rather worse than murder to beget children in a slum, to beget children for whom no fitting provision is made") and in "The Garden" (1916), in which a society woman is represented as sterile—"In her is the end of breeding"—but she is surrounded by "a rabble / Of the filthy, sturdy, unkillable infants of the very poor" (qtd. 152).

Leonard Woolf (to return to *Hunting the Highbrow* for a moment), aware of the implications of social theory for cultural theory, uses reproduction as a metaphor for cultural production: "the highbrow is a very slow-breeding animal; he is rarely prolific; he

is often in favor of and practises birth control; and there are not very many of him who are actually writing books in any generation. The problems of over-population do not, therefore, apply to highbrow literature" (25). The perceived growth in the "lower" populations in the early part of the century paralleled the very real growth of mass-produced lowbrow reading material. Greenslade notes how changes in the imagery used to characterize the "masses" reflected a shift in focus of the population question toward a need for control and containment. The "masses," metaphorized as waste and debris in the mid-nineteenth century, began to be described in terms of unhealthy, uncontainable, uncontrollable growth in the late nineteenth century:

> But by the 1880s, with the hereditarian consciousness well established, the people in the mass were represented less as waste-matter (though that concept of the "residuum" persisted) than as a persistently degenerate "abysmal" fecundity; intensely active, and out of control, as fascinating and disgusting as a jar of writhing maggots. The "refuse" which had been thought of as a source of a "miasma" was now biologized into a breeding mass, horribly fertile. Post-Darwinian science had changed the metaphorical agenda. The labouring classes *breed*, their offspring are a "rank evilly-fostered growth." (Gissing, 1889, quoted in Greenslade 256)

Not only that, they could now *read*! In *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, D.H. Lawrence uses the same imagery of rapid proliferation, disease, and contagion to refer to mass culture: books and newspapers are "tissues of leprosy," and schools, where the masses learn to read, are "hotbeds of self-conscious disease" (87). Society was degenerating; was

culture?

Marie Stopes and D.H. Lawrence

The desire to control and contain undesirable people and undesirable literature led to the proposed development of eugenic practices, both positive and negative, that would attack the breeding mass at its *source*: for the population, this meant the reproductive body; for culture, this meant the schools. Birth control crusader Marie Stopes, whose marriage manuals *Married Love* (1918) and *Wise Parenthood* (1918) were bestsellers, and D.H. Lawrence, whose *Fantasia of the Unconscious* (1922) aimed to repel the general reader, nevertheless shared a eugenicist agenda.

In 1922, when English literary modernism was reaching a pinnacle with the publication of *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land*, Stopes's *Married Love* was into its ninth edition; by 1923 it had sold over 400 000 copies[9] since its publication in 1918 and received enthusiastic praise from readers, doctors and medical journals like the *Lancet* and the *British Medical Journal* (qtd. in Porter and Hall 208–9), and intellectuals such as Bernard Shaw (Ruth Hall, *Passionate Crusader*, 147). Its sequel, *Wise Parenthood*, which had an introduction by Arnold Bennett, appeared later in 1918 and gave details about the birth control methods only vaguely alluded to in the first book. In 1921 Stopes opened England's first birth control clinic (Mother's Clinic) in a working-class district of

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[9] This is Melman's figure (3). Porter and Hall state that it sold 17 000 in the first year of publication (208). Lesley Hall, in "Uniting Sense and Sensibility: Marie Stopes and the Narratives of Marriage in the 1920s," gives the figure "over a half-million" within five years of publication (123). Soloway states that it "sold two thousand copies within two weeks of publication and seven editions the first year," exceeding one million copies by the start of the second world war (211).

London and formed the Society for Constructive Birth Control and Racial Progress. Though Stopes liked to believe she was encouraging "constructive" parenthood, promoting birth control for married couples to have planned, desired children, her efforts to direct her birth control campaign towards the working classes reflected the popular shift towards negative eugenics during and after the first world war. Both the Eugenics Society, which had since 1907 supported a positive eugenic policy that encouraged "selective" marriage and reproduction of the middle to upper classes (positive eugenicist Leonard Darwin assumed presidency in 1911), and the New Generation League (changed from Malthusian League in 1922 (Soloway 194)) shifted in the 1920s towards a negative policy that aimed to reduce the fertility of the working classes (Soloway 202).[10]

The Eugenics Society attracted a highbrow following of academics, doctors, and professionals; Stopes was herself a middle-class intellectual, a respected paleobotanist with doctoral degrees from University of London and University of Munich. Stopes's sensibilities with regard to the population question were distinctly classist, reflecting a "class burden" mentality that focussed on teaching the lower classes to reduce their fertility, for the good of their social betters and for the good of "the race" in general. Stopes romanticized sex for the middle and upper classes who could afford to buy her books—in *Married Love: A New Contribution to the Solution of Sex Difficulties* she draws a parallel between "the rapture of lovers" and "the glow of half-swooning rapture in which the mystic's whole being melts and floats in the light of the divine force" (127)

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[10] Frances W. Stella Browne in particular wrote numerous articles on labour for the *New Generation* journal and gave lectures on birth control to mining communities.

but is vague about contraception—while she emphasized the problems of unwanted children for the lower classes in the pamphlet *A Letter to Working Mothers: On How to Have Healthy Children and Avoid Weakening Pregnancies* (1919). Soloway notes that the erotic passages were absent in the *Letter*, which focussed instead on the miseries of large families and "did not dally on the delights of married love savored by the liberated of higher station, but got right to the point" about birth control methods (215). Although the *Letter* recommends *Married Love* for couples who "wish really to do the best thing possible for each other and to understand each other's needs" and to "know many things about being married" (*Letter* 14), it is a straightforward, sympathetic pamphlet that emphasizes the disadvantages of unwanted children, strictly condemns abortion, and discusses the effectiveness of various birth control methods and where birth control devices may be obtained and fitted.

The middle to upper classes and the higher brow often saw it as their responsibility to control the growth of the lower and poorer classes, even sterilize them, if possible.[11] Stopes's eugenic ideals were particularly pronounced in the sequels to *Married Love*, where her desire to reduce the fertility of the poor and "degenerate" populations is explicit and her intended audience is more clearly the privileged classes. *Wise Parenthood* and *Radiant Motherhood* show that Stopes's reading of Darwin and Galton had convinced her that breeding from genetically "superior" strains was to be

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[11] In *Anticipations*, H.G. Wells expressed in chilling language that "the nation" that will dominate must have the largest proportion of "educated and intelligent engineers and agriculturists, of doctors, schoolmasters, professional soldiers, and intellectually active people of all sorts"; a responsible nation "picks over, educates, sterilizes, exports, or poisons its people of the Abyss" (Greenslade 197).

encouraged—and procreation of the "unfit" discouraged—in order to promote reproductive selection of the "fittest." In *Wise Parenthood* (1918) Stopes claims that the "less thrifty and conscientious" are parasites preying upon the welfare provided by their betters:

> The thriftless who breed so rapidly tend by that very fact to bring forth children who are weakened and handicapped by physical as well as mental warping and weakness, and at the same time to demand their support from the sound and thrifty… this half is not free and untrammelled, but is burdened by the partial support and upkeep of the unfit portion of the population, and hence is less able to support children of its own good type than it would were the incapables non-existent. (18)

Stopes is strongly, harshly degenerationist, echoing Morel in her insistence that "heredity *does* tell" (*Wise Parenthood* 1) and asserting that "the diseased, the racially negligent, the thriftless, the careless, the feeble-minded, the very lowest and worst members of the community" could only produce "stunted, warped and inferior infants" that would be "doomed from their very physical inheritance to be at the best but partly self-supporting" (*Radiant Motherhood* qtd. in Ruth Hall, *Passionate Crusader* 180–81). Without them, the "better classes," who have "a sense of *responsibility*," would not have to support "hospitals, prisons, and so on" and could afford to enlarge their own, eugenically sound families (180–81, my italics). For Stopes, the responsibilities of the "better classes" included compulsory legal sterilization of "those totally unfit for motherhood" (181), which included, for example, women who were "dissolute, harried, overworked and

worried into a dull and careless apathy," who "have already produced a number of low-grade or semi-feeble infants" and who were unable to, or refused to, use birth control (*Wise Parenthood* 37–38):

> When Bills are passed to ensure the sterility of the hopelessly rotten and racially diseased…our race[12] will rapidly quell the stream of depraved, hopeless and wretched lives which are at present ever increasing in proportion in our midst. (181)

D.H. Lawrence was especially self-serving about this "class burden," hypothetically proposing the outright elimination of the unfit and suggesting that degenerates should be grateful to their betters for putting them out of their misery. Already in 1908 Lawrence was expounding the responsibilities of the privileged class in which he positioned himself:

> If I had my way, I would build a lethal chamber as big as the Crystal Palace with a military band playing softly, and a Cinematograph working brightly. The I'd go out in the back streets and main streets and bring them in, all the sick, the halt, and the maimed; I would lead them gently, and they would smile me a weary thanks; and the band would softly

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[12] Stopes's use of the words "race" and "racial" is fairly consistent, referring not to ethnicity but to the human "race" in general and the "quality" of future generations: hence, "racially inferior," "racial stream," "racially diseased," "race-regeneration," race-suicide." Birth control was to promote "racial hygiene," or the practice of limited and selective reproduction, by allowing parents to have only the amount of children they could support; Stopes's recommended method of birth control was "the small check pessary which she had designed herself" and named, aptly, "the 'Pro-Race' cap" (Ruth Hall, *Passionate Crusader*, 199; see also Stopes's *Letter to Working Mothers* 10). Though Stopes did not use "race" to refer to ethnicity (that is, she did not use terms like "racially inferior" to denigrate non-whites), she did disapprove of miscegenation and advised that "half-castes should be sterilised at birth" (Ruth Hall, *Passionate Crusader*, 182).

> bubble out the "Hallelujah Chorus." (in a letter to Blanche Jennings, qtd. in Carey 12)

Carey notes that Lawrence's later interest in poison gas ("three cheers for the inventors of poison gas," *Fantasia* 144) suggests "what else would softly bubble out in order to make his lethal chamber lethal" (12). Lawrence's contempt extends to cultural degeneracy as well as social degeneracy: he implies a "highbrow burden" by suggesting that the Crystal Palace,[13] the military band, and the Cinematograph, icons of the popular culture Lawrence despised, would help draw the "unfit" to his chamber. Mollified by lowbrow amusements, the masses would face elimination with smiles of gratitude. His stance is somewhat hypocritical, considering that he was himself in constant poor health, was considered unfit for military service (the large numbers of men unfit for service were seen by degenerationists as a sure sign of England's decline), and suffered from financial worries all his life; it was Lawrence's education that justified his class snobbery. Although Lawrence glibly advocates the elimination of degenerates, however, *Fantasia of the Unconscious* would show that he does not include in his hypothetical program members of the working class if they were sound of body. Lawrence had no objection to the working classes and in fact felt that their "natures" were action- and instinct-oriented and therefore necessary to the vitality of the race, *as long as* they did not learn to read or

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[13] The Crystal Palace was originally constructed in Hyde Park, London to house the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations (1851), a world fair which attracted six million visitors in its six-month duration. The Palace's unique architectural design allowed it to be reassembled afterwards at Sydenham, where it was garishly decorated ("Nothing was too large or too silly…everything was swept together into the hotchpot to astonish and amuse the masses" (Hobhouse 159–60)) and used as an entertainment palace and festival site before it succumbed to fire in 1936. See Christopher Hobhouse, *1851 and the Crystal Palace*, and Phillip Thurmond Smith's entry in *Victorian Britain: An Encyclopedia*.

write and pollute this "primary consciousness" with mental activity, or participate in the production and consumption of cultural materials.

Stopes's books were also meant to appeal to better-educated, higher-brow, primarily middle-class readers, but their immense commercial success suggests that they actually reached a larger, cross-class reading audience over time. *Married Love* proved to be the most popular; both men and women of varying ages, mostly from the middle class but ranging widely, were encouraged by its forthrightness about sex and its generally inclusive rhetoric, as letters post-publication would show.[14] Though the book recommends that couples space their children and practice some form of conception control in order to avoid unwanted pregnancies, it barely touches on the practical aspects of birth control and is primarily a manual that offers advice on married life, advocates sexual pleasure for both sexes, and provides frank language for the sexual organs and for intercourse.

Stopes's voice of authority in *Married Love* is a reassuring one, putting readers who might feel embarrassed or shameful at ease by interpellating them as "average, healthy, mating creatures" who may find "happiness" in reading her book (17). The tone is user-friendly, directed at "the ordinary untrained reader" (15) at the same time that it claims to represent "the British, and primarily…our educated classes" (31); while her rhetoric mirrors Frankau's, with its appeal to nationalism and the average reader, it also draws the intellectual, "'educated'" man who "devours all the books on sex he can

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[14] The voluminous Stopes correspondence (Marie Stopes Papers or Marie Stopes Collection) is housed in the British Library and in the possession of Stopes's son, Dr. Harry Stopes-Roe. For a published selection of the letters, see *Dear Dr. Stopes: Sex in the 1920s*, ed. by Ruth Hall.

obtain" and has found no "real guidance" (45). Her book gently promotes race-regeneration—though perhaps only for the "fit" readers—by emphasizing that sex is healthy and that "the race" cannot uphold celibacy as an ideal: "If our race as a whole set out to pursue an ideal which must ultimately eliminate bodies altogether, it is clear that very soon we should find the conditions of our environment so altered that we could no longer speak of the human race" (28); celibacy would lead to race-suicide. It calls attention to bodies and pleasures, promoting sexual pleasure as separate from its procreative function. In *Wise Parenthood*, she makes her point explicitly: "On physiological, moral and religious grounds, I advocate the restrained and sacramental rhythmic performance of the marriage rite of physical union, throughout the whole married life, as an act of supreme value in itself, separate and distinct from its value as a basis for the procreation of children" (148).

Significantly, although Stopes's main goal is to draw readers into sharing her knowledge, she subtly excludes "others" who may not be degenerate but at the same time are not quite sexually legitimate, such as the "*femmes incomprises*, and all the innumerable neurotic, super-sensitive, and slightly abnormal people," from *Married Love*'s program for sexual "happiness" (33). Further, although Stopes emphasizes that women should demand sexual pleasure, it seems they may only do so within the legitimizing structure of heterosexual marriage, as the title of the book makes clear; she does not address single women and lesbian women. While her intended readership is to practice birth control for nonprocreative pleasure as long as they also further the race, these abjects are barred from experiencing pleasure of any sort, procreative or not. Like

Lawrence, Stopes distinguishes between undesirable members of society at large—degenerates—and undesirable readers, who were not degenerates but were still unlikely to benefit from her books. Stopes excludes certain readers because of the threat they posed to the (hetero)sexual norms she strove to establish; Lawrence excludes readers on the basis of the threat they posed to high culture.

D.H. Lawrence's *Fantasia of the Unconscious* exercises no subtlety in its exclusion of undesirable readers. On the whole, his book possesses intriguing similarities in topic to Stopes's book—its mystical view of sex, its discussion of the roles of husband and wife in the marriage relationship, its encouragement of the separation of spouses, its examination of the function of post-coital slumber—but it is clear from the first page that he does not intend it to be read by any brow but the highest. *Married Love* occupies a curious middle ground: although it was written for a middle to higher brow audience, its appeal to the "ordinary untrained reader" more closely conforms to Frankau's important criterion of lowbrow literature, that "a good book must be the common property of all who can read"; its popularity attests that it went "straight to the heart of the public." Further, its focus on sexual practice and pleasure rather than theory and thought might place its readership in the lowbrow camp, quite the opposite of Robert Magill's definition (in "a Sunday paper") of the "highbrow" reader as "the man who prefers the appeal to his intellect rather than solely to his senses" (qtd. in Woolf's *Hunting the Highbrow* 8). In contrast, Lawrence's abrasive introduction to *Fantasia*, originally written in perhaps bitter

response to unfavorable reviews of *Psychoanalysis of the Unconscious*,[15] firmly excludes the average reader. Books are *never* "the common property of all who can read":

> I don't intend my books for the generality of readers. I count it a mistake of our mistaken democracy that every man who can read print is allowed to believe that he can read all that is printed. I count it a misfortune that serious books are exposed in the public market, like slaves exposed naked for sale. (11)

"Serious books" do not belong in the "public market" with, presumably, bestsellers and newspapers, and Lawrence is very adamant about making the distinction between the elite reader and the lowbrow reader. The very "generality of readers" that Stopes encourages is challenged by Lawrence's warning that "this present book will seem to them only a rather more revolting mass of wordy nonsense than the last"[16]; the "generality of critics" is dared to "throw it in the waste paper basket without more ado" (11). Lawrence's bluster is as much a reflection of his snobbery as it is of his defensiveness about the reception of his books. Lawrence's somewhat bathetic metaphorization of "serious books" as "slaves exposed naked for sale" reverses the usual ideological hierarchies by victimizing the highbrow elite. The "general reader" is represented as a sort of john who contributes to a cultural degeneration by perpetrating the "prostitution" of books like

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[15] Thomas Seltzer had sent Lawrence some reviews of *Psychoanalysis*, to which Lawrence responded with considerable hostility in the original foreword to *Fantasia* titled "An Answer to Some Critics." Seltzer would not publish the first two-thirds of this foreword. See Ellis and Mills, *D.H. Lawrence's Non-Fiction: Art, Thought and Genre*, 72.

[16] Lawrence took the epithet "revolting mass of wordy nonsense" directly from one of the reviews of *Psychoanalysis* (qtd. in Ellis and Mills 72). See Ellis and Mills for a discussion of what they, and I, see as Lawrence's distrust of his readership and his "patronizing yet defensive" tone (71–72).

Fantasia of the Unconscious in the public market, doubtless next to the unsavoury *Daily Mail* and bestsellers like E.M. Hull's *The Sheik*.

In *Fantasia of the Unconscious* Lawrence suggests a program for a cultural eugenics that would eliminate the category of "general reader"—and prevent, presumably, the proliferation of newspapers, cheap novels, and other lowbrow literature—by eliminating education:

> Let all schools be closed at once. Keep only a few technical training establishments, nothing more. Let humanity lie fallow, for two generations at least. Let no child learn to read, unless it learns by itself out of its own individual persistent desire. (69)

His is a polemic against compulsory education, a hypothetical program for cultural containment that will prevent the majority of the population from attaining literacy and from contributing to the dreaded "public market" of mass literature, which he evokes with images of disease and contagion:

> We really can refrain from thrusting our children any more into those hot-beds of self-conscious disease, schools. We really can prevent their eating much more of the tissues of leprosy, newspapers and books. For a time, there should be no compulsory teaching to read and write at all. *The great mass of humanity should never learn to read and write—never.* (*Fantasia* 87, Lawrence's italics)

Lawrence's rant against education extends to sexual education. Where Stopes insists that "instinct is *not* enough" (16) for sexual fulfillment, Lawrence emphatically argues, "The

mass of mankind should *never* be acquainted with the scientific biological facts of life: *never*. The mystery must remain in its dark secrecy and its dark, powerful dynamism" (14). Seven years later, in "Pornography and Obscenity" (1929), he would write—using Stopes as an example—that "being wise and scientific" about sex "in the serious and earnest manner" could not lead to good sex. He asserted that "by being wise and scientific" one could "kill sex altogether with too much seriousness and intellect, or else leave it a miserable disinfected secret…you kill dynamic sex altogether, and leave only the scientific and deliberate mechanism" (182). Satisfied readers of *Married Love* would have thought this madness.

Lawrence's plea for keeping the masses ignorant suggests an idealization of the *no-brow* as more noble than the lowbrow and more "natural" than the high, a notion that stems from the Romantics and from Rousseau. Lawrence's main desire is to preserve the "primary consciousness" of instinct and action in the race by limiting to an elite few the development of the "mental consciousness," which he likens to a parasite that saps one's vitality: "The ideal mind, the brain, has become the vampire of modern life, sucking up the blood and the life" (*Fantasia* 69). He warns that "mental consciousness," learned in the schools, is not to be envied, and characterizes intellectual activity as undesirable and dangerous to one's health: "The children of the middle classes are so vitally impoverished that the miracle is they continue to exist at all. The children of the lower classes do better, because they escape into the streets. But even the children of the proletariat are now infected" (91). As an alternative, Lawrence suggests leaving the masses to a mechanical existence driven purely by unconscious desires, and, with the word "Let's,"

rhetorically implicates the intellectual reader in his plans to keep them there: "The mass of the people," says Lawrence, "will never *mentally understand*. But they will soon instinctively fall into line…Let's substitute action, all kinds of action, for the mass of people, in place of mental activity" (87). "Let her learn the domestic arts in their perfection," he says of girls, "Let us even artificially set her to spin and weave. Anything to keep her busy, to prevent them reading and becoming self-conscious" (87). By emphasizing the "instinctive" ignorance and complacence of working class men and women, by denying them literacy, he limits their access to discourse and reduces their threat to his own cultural position.

As in his letter to Blanche Jennings, Lawrence in *Fantasia* subscribes to the "highbrow burden," which I use in this case to describe Lawrence's belief in intellectual activity as a responsibility from which he must rescue the "working man," which the working man must hand over to Lawrence for his own good. He exhorts, "For the mass of people, knowledge must be symbolical, mythical, dynamic. This means, you must have a higher, responsible, conscious class: and then in varying degrees the lower classes, varying in their degree of consciousness" (76–77); "Relieved of this responsibility for general affairs, the populace can again become free and happy and spontaneous, leaving matters to their superiors" (88). Lawrence's attitude is patronizing throughout; he uses the first person conditional ("I would") to assert his position of dominance as part of this superior class.

> And me? There is no danger of the working man ever reading my books, so I shan't hurt him that way. But oh, I would like to save him

> alive, in his living, spontaneous, original being. I can't help it. It is my passionate instinct.
>
> I would like him to give me back the responsibility for general affairs, a responsibility which he can't acquit, and which saps his life. I would like him to give me back the responsibility for the future. I would like him to give me back the responsibility for thought, for direction. I wish we could take hope and belief together. I would undertake my share of the responsibility, if he gave me his belief. (115–16)

In much the same way that Stopes views the privileged classes as needing to take responsibility for the race by suppressing the reproductive activity of the "unfit," Lawrence wants the higher brow to take responsibility for culture, art, and intellectual activity ("I would like him to give me back books and newspapers and theories" (116)), thereby curbing the production of mass art.[17] "No newspapers," he emphasizes with especial disdain, "the mass of the people never learning to read" (88). The working man is reduced to a Romantic notion of the "noble savage," ignorant and blissful, who in relinquishing cultural responsibility would regain "his old insouciance, and rich, original spontaneity and fullness of life" (116).

Both Lawrence and Stopes demonstrated a failure to meet their ideals in practice. *Fantasia*'s overt exclusionary attitude, for example, has the effect of alienating readers of

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[17] Despite his "eugenic" attitude towards culture, Lawrence would probably not have supported Stopes's eugenic program for society, if Laurie Taylor is correct in her suggestion that Lawrence disliked contraception because he thought it repressive to the sexual instincts. See Taylor, "The Unfinished Sexual Revolution," 487.

any brow, while Lawrence's habit of self-contradiction seriously undermines the boundaries between the dual categories—body (primary consciousness) and brain (mental consciousness), lowbrow (general reader) and highbrow (intellectual reader)—he tries to establish. Lawrence's self-indulgently inconsistent tone, by turns didactic ("That is my serious admonition, gentle reader" (69)) yet self-mocking ("I'm sure, dear reader, you'd rather have to listen to the brat howling in its crib than to me expounding its plexuses" (42)), deferent yet threatening ("I am not so flighty as to imagine you will pay any heed…and if you *don't* pay any heed, calamity will at length shut your schools for you" (69), leads readers (not to mention reviewers at the time)[18] to question whether he is in earnest. Second, he warns that trying to explain or understand sex mentally is dangerous and even degenerate, but as one critic puts it, he was himself on "one long quest for a new discourse on sexuality" (Nielsen 272), far guiltier of "sex in the head" than Marie Stopes, whose efforts to promote sexual understanding clearly benefited the sexual *body*. To use Foucault's terms, though Lawrence seems approving of *ars erotica*, it is Stopes who more closely approaches it (in her dedication to practice and pleasure and "the supreme human art, the art of love" (*Married Love* 17)), if not her dissemination of sexual knowledge) while Lawrence forges a *scientia sexualis*. Thirdly, Lawrence's positioning of himself as a highbrow intellectual in spite of his own working-class background (his father was a miner, his mother a schoolteacher) weakens his argument for an essentially ignorant

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[18] Ben Lucian Burman, in *The Nation*, writes, "To take or not to take it seriously is the question…. It is most upsetting to be laughed at when sternly striving to understand complicated psyches and complex supermen…. The Moses bringing to the world the code for a new order must not come with a twinkle in his eye and an extra deck of cards tucked between the commandment tablets" (74). Hugh L'Anson Fausset's very favourable review in *The Bookman* nevertheless begins by stating that Lawrence is "a genius who is always in danger of lapsing, not of set purpose but in the fury of his antagonisms, into a charlatan" (314).

working class; he seems not to acknowledge the influence of intellectual capital on his own class position. Most importantly, Lawrence discourages the "general reader" from buying his books, yet a writer must have a readership in order to survive; no matter how Lawrence may have despised the "public market," he could not afford to divorce himself from it. No matter how avant-garde its ideas, the book still needed an audience, a publisher, and buyers, within the cultural field of his peers or outside it; the hostility of Lawrence's reply to negative reviews of *Psychoanalysis of the Unconscious* showed that he felt "the generality of critics" a threat to his position as an intellectual.

Meanwhile, the high eugenic ideals championed by Stopes in her books were never achieved in practice. Deborah A. Cohen's article, "Private Lives in Public Spaces: Marie Stopes, the Mothers' Clinics and the Practice of Contraception" has already drawn attention to the gap between Stopes's often harsh rhetoric on paper and her real-life compassion towards working-class women in the Mothers' Clinics. In her examination of the "material practice of the clinics, and on contraceptive use within working-class homes," based on weekly letters written to Stopes by the midwives at the clinics, Cohen argues convincingly that Stopes "subordinated eugenic and political considerations to her overriding concern for the individual woman's health and happiness" (97). Birth control was given to all women who wanted it, "regardless of their wealth or social standing" (101); fertility advice was given to all women, including clearly "dysgenic" cases where "the.white wife of a black man received 'pro-baby' counselling" and where "an obese patient with a harelip and a cleft palate…bec[a]me pregnant with the aid of the clinic" (102). Though these examples are somewhat extreme, Stopes's real-life dedication to

sexual and reproductive happiness did consistently contradict her fervent eugenic pronouncements.

Clearly, Stopes and Lawrence's failure to adhere to their own systems of social, sexual, and cultural legitimation complicates the categorization of "high" and "low" as self-contained, strictly oppositional fields. Stopes encouraged the happiness of her clients regardless of their eugenic standing, while Lawrence's vehement exclusions of the "low" could easily, ironically, be applied to himself, despite his "highbrow" status. Meanwhile, the right to literacy, however contested, could not be controlled; the reading masses continued to buy newspapers and magazines. Questions of legitimacy—Who was entitled to knowledge? To sexual knowledge?—were further complicated in the fictional realm, where the popularity of story magazines and romance novels of the period resulted in the gendering of the lowbrow "class" as female. My second chapter focusses on one such novel, E.M. Hull's *The Sheik*, and examines its function for women in the context of the sexual knowledges presented by marriage manuals like *Married Love*.

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The Significance of Popular Sexual Knowledges for Women's Agency: Marie Stopes's *Married Love* and E.M. Hull's *The Sheik*

In E.M. Hull's bestselling novel *The Sheik* (1919),[1] fair English rose Diana Mayo asks her captor, the smoldering Ahmed Ben Hassan, "Why have you brought me here?" He replies, "*Bon Dieu*! Are you not woman enough to know?" This exchange, retained in the wildly popular Hollywood film, reflects the changing times and the postwar boom in popular sexual knowledges, especially in the form of sex manuals such as Marie Stopes's *Married Love* (1918)[2] and similar works as G. Courtenay Beale's *Wise Wedlock* (2nd ed., 1922) and Isabel Hutton's *The Hygiene of Marriage* (1923). Ahmed's comment implies that Diana *should*—by the essential nature of her sex—know what seduction entails; however, many unmarried women, despite the greater access to information, remained ignorant of the physical reality of sexual intercourse and clueless about the functions of their reproductive anatomy.

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[1] Melman notes that *The Sheik* ran into 108 editions in Britain between 1919 and 1923 (46); its sales "surpassed those of all the contemporary best-sellers put together" (90). The term "bestseller"—also "big seller" or "super-seller"—came into common usage in the 1920s.

[2] *Married Love* was first published in March 1918, eight months before the end of the war; by 1921, it was into its ninth edition. To give an idea of Stopes's phenomenal success, Melman notes in her study that "*Married Love* sold over 400 000 copies in hardback between 1918 and 1923, *more than the total for all the bestsellers discussed in this book*" (3, my italics), including *The Sheik*. Though no bestseller lists exist, *Married Love* and *The Sheik* might be considered the top selling books in Britain at this time.

Married Love

Although *Married Love: A New Contribution to the Solution of Sex Difficulties* (1918) was to offer many grateful middle- and upper- class men and women a language to talk about the body and about sex, Marie Stopes herself was, until the fall of 1913, in the dark. Seeking to escape from a disastrous first marriage to Reginald Ruggles Gates, Stopes—who ironically held a doctorate in botany at a time when botanical metaphors were often used in sex education—needed to scour the "Cupboard" or "Private Case," the restricted-access area of the British Museum Reading Room, in order to conclude that Gates was impotent and that her marriage had never been consummated.[3] At the time of writing *Married Love*, Stopes was still, technically, a virgin.

In *Married Love* Stopes bemoans a silence on sexual matters so profound that even doctors and educated people misrepresented facts or refused to write about sex. She writes that even "in books on advanced Physiology and Medicine the gaps, the omissions, and even the misstatements of bare fact are amazing" (17) and that "about the much more fundamental and vital problems of sex, there is a lack of knowledge so abysmal and so universal that its mists and shadowy darkness have affected even the few who lead us, and who are prosecuting research in these subjects" (32–33). Letters to Stopes after the publication of *Married Love*, from women of varying educational backgrounds, typically

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[3] See Lesley Hall, "Uniting Science and Sensibility," 120. Aylmer Maude's biography of Stopes states that she "read pretty nearly every book on sex in English, French or German" (qtd. in Ruth Hall, *Passionate Crusader*, 101). Ruth Hall's biography specifies that Stopes read Marshall and Starling's treatises on the physiology of reproduction, August Forel's *Sexual Ethics* and *The Sexual Question*, Alice B. Stockham's *Karezza*, Edward Carpenter, and Havelock Ellis's *Man and Woman* and *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (101–2). Stopes was disturbed—"it made me feel choked and dirty for three months" (qtd. in Ruth Hall, *Passionate Crusader*, 102))—by Ellis's sympathy with sexual deviance and emphasizes in *Married Love* that her book is meant for normal married persons.

read, "until I recently read your books I had not any knowledge of what the words 'marriage rite' meant" and "Very much in the dark as to the physical side of marriage" (qtd. in Porter and Hall 251). Maureen Sutton's study of women's lives in Lincolnshire in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s reveals the same general ignorance of sexual and reproductive functions, referring to a woman whose sister ran home on her wedding night because her husband "tried to do something terrible to her," another in her forties who wished to "get unwed" because her husband had tried "something very rude," and others who went into labour "Not knowing where the baby was going to come out" (qtd. in Porter and Hall 251–53). Evidence from these sources as well as from the Mass Observation "Sex Survey" conducted in Britain in the late 1940s shows that doctors were generally unhelpful, that family members and married friends were often too embarrassed to talk about sex, and that most people learned about it in haphazard ways; according to Mass Observation, it was "picked up…off the street, from workmates, from other children, from whatever literature, 'respectable' or otherwise, they could lay their hands on, or just by keeping their eyes and ears open" (qtd. in Porter and Hall 255).[4] Stopes's assessment of the "mists and shadowy darkness" surrounding sexual matters was correct; misinformation and superstition abounded.

Stopes positions herself as an empathetic guru by alluding frankly to her own

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[4] See my source, Porter and Hall, particularly chapter 11, "The Makings of Popular Sexual Knowledges," for a full discussion of how men and women learned about sex; it refers to the Stopes papers, to Maureen Sutton's *'We Didn't Know Aught': A Study of Sexuality, Superstition, and Death in Women's Lives in Lincolnshire during the 1930s, 40s, and 50s* (Stanford: Paul Watkins, 1992), and to the surveys of the Mass Observation organization (founded by anthropologist Tom Harrisson in 1937 to undertake a study of social behavior in Britain), all three of which I quote here. See also Ruth Hall's *Dear Dr. Stopes* for letters from grateful women who wrote to thank Stopes for enlightening them.

ignorance in the past, stressing the happiness of married couples as the supreme goal of sex education. June Rose, in her 1992 biography, suggests that Stopes may even have have exaggerated her ignorance in order to seem more approachable to readers (76–79).[5] In her preface to *Married Love* Stopes, who believed herself to be a "priest and prophet mixed" (letter to H.V. Roe, qtd. in Ruth Hall, *Passionate Crusader*, 151), presents her ignorance as an impetus for the writing of the book and sexual enlightenment as her "gospel," to be shared with the world:

> In my first marriage I paid such a terrible price for sex-ignorance that I feel that knowledge gained at such a cost should be placed at the service of humanity. In this little book, average healthy mating creatures will find the key to the happiness which should be the portion of each. It has already guided some to happiness, and I hope it may save some others years of heartache and blind questioning in the dark. (17)

Married Love provides straightforward and explicit sexual information, addressed to men and women—"What actually happens in an act of union should be known...." (86), "every mating man and woman should know the following..." (77)—and, in particular, ensures that there are no surprises for virgin brides on the wedding night:

> She generally has neither the theoretical knowledge nor the spontaneous physical development which might give the capacity even to imagine the basic facts of physical marriage, and her bridegroom may shock her

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[5] Rose's evidence gives some justification to this claim, though her biography is not always critically sound regarding Stopes's sexuality, claiming, for example, that Stopes was "bisexual by nature" (59).

without knowing that he was doing so. (34)

> One would think that every girl who was about to be married would be told of this necessary rupturing of the membrane and the temporary pain it would cause her; but even still large numbers of girls are allowed to marry in complete and cruel ignorance. (87)

More importantly, though, Stopes furthered the marriage manual's function to treat sex as more than a reproductive function. She was the first to present sexual love as a necessarily *mutual* fulfillment, an emotional and even mystical tie between husband and wife that is conducive to *happiness*, which, as it is reiterated again and again in *Married Love*, was Stopes's overarching concern.

Before *Married Love* there had already been marriage manuals, but none that offered such explicit explanations of bodies and pleasures in such an accessible, personal rhetoric—eager readers wrote mounds of letters seeking advice and offering praise—and, particularly, none that gave such full attention to women's sexuality. Roy Porter and Lesley Hall's thorough study *The Facts of Life: The Creation of Sexual Knowledge in Britain, 1650–1950* mentions R.T. Trall's *Sexual Physiology and Hygiene* (US, c. 1888; British ed., 1908) and L.B. Sperry's *Confidential Talks with Husband and Wife* (1900) as predecessors to *Married Love*, noting that "in their emphasis on the marriage relationship and its right conduct, some themes were already emerging which laid foundations for the efflorescence of the genre in the 1920s" (203), though "the possibility that female sexual desire might not be a simple response, even when not turned to disgust by male brutality,

was not an issue" (205). Again and again, Stopes emphasizes the importance of sex education, particularly for women, assuring them that sexual drives are normal and not shameful as society would have them believe:

> ...it is true that the whole education of girls, which so largely consists in the concealment of the essential facts of life from them; and the positive teaching so prevalent that the racial instincts are low and shameful; and also the social condition which places so many women in the position of depending on their husband's will not only for the luxuries but for the necessaries of life...have all tended to inhibit natural sex-impulses in women, and to conceal and distort what remains. (60)

Rather than simply offering "the words" (Margaret Bondfield's[6] euphemism) to talk about sex and the body, *Married Love* was new in giving full attention to women's sexuality, and in arguing that "No. Instinct is *not* enough" (16) for mutual sexual satisfaction. Stopes urges that "a man does not woo and win a woman once and for all when he marries her: *he must woo her before every separate act of coitus*" (88), explains the function of the clitoris (93), and devotes a chapter to her theory of "The Periodicity of Recurrence of Desire," which, though now known to be inaccurate, charts what she believed to be the days during the woman's menstrual cycle when sexual desire is highest

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[6] Margaret Bondfield was Britain's first woman cabinet minister. David Trotter, in *The English Novel in History*, refers to her description of the Women's Co-operative Guild, whose members came from the "respectable working class (Lawrence's mother was secretary of the Eastwood branch...)" and whose mandate was "to provide healthy open teaching. At the lectures it organized, many women 'heard the names and functions of their bodily organs for the first time'; these women wanted above all to know 'the words'" (206). Biographer Ruth Hall notes that "From Havelock Ellis, Marie Stopes took her nonchalant use of physiological terms—penis, clitoris, vagina and mucous were used freely for the first time in a popular work" (*Passionate Crusader*, 133).

and lowest. Her rhetoric, if somewhat cloying, must have been very freeing for women who had never been able to feel that their desires were "wonderful tides, scented and enriched by the myriad experiences of the human race from its ancient days of leisure and flower-wreathed love-making, urging [them] to transports and to self-expressions" (50).

Certainly, Stopes's views were not uniformly liberating for women. Lesley Hall notes Sheila Jeffreys's criticism of Stopes's views as a "cryptopatriarchal model of heterosexual marriage" that closes off options like nonmarital sex and lesbianism; Hall herself takes a more sympathetic approach to Stopes's work but rightly points out that Stopes's essentialist representations of men as the pursuer of the innately mysterious, "always escaping" woman (*Married Love* 119) "held the capacity to undermine Stopes's beliefs in the wider potential of her sex, however much she advocated untraditional qualities such as male sensitivity" ("Uniting Science and Sensibility" 124). And yet Stopes rebelled against certain essentialisms as well. She argues that women are not naturally "capricious" nor "contrary" any more than they are, as some smilingly and "patronisingly" say, "more instinctive, more childlike, less reasonable than men" (47–49). She refutes misconceptions and misrepresentations of women in the arts: "Many writers, novelists, poets and dramatists have represented the uttermost tragedy of human life as due to the incomprehensible contrariness of the feminine nature.... Woman is *not* essentially capricious" (47). For Stopes, women's sexual desires are not governed by whim, but, for the most part, by biology. Admittedly, it is no triumph for subjectivity if women's desire is governed by anything but will, but at least Stopes legitimizes woman's sexual desire on its own terms, tracing its origins to biology, to a sort of collective

unconscious of the "race," leading to a subjective "self-expression" (50) that is independent of her lover. Further, I am in firm agreement with Lesley Hall ("Uniting Sense and Sensibility") that readers did not care about such ambiguities, as their glowing letters showed; Stopes's vision of women's sexuality as autonomous and deserving of respect from their lovers was in itself liberating for women.

Married Love's prescription for women's autonomy did not stop at sex. Stopes urged that women should "desire freedom for creative work," "possess intellectual freedom," and be in marriage a "desirable friend and intellectual comrade" (169), for "Marriage cannot reach its full stature until women possess as much intellectual freedom and freedom of opportunity within it as do their partners" (168). Stopes furthered the new notion of the "companionate marriage" by discussing, in addition to the purely physical realities of sex, the psychological aspects of marriage and cohabitation, in particular the need for husband and wife to have physical and intellectual space for themselves independent of the other. For example, she states that mutual orgasm is necessary for a sound sleep, but also suggests keeping separate bedrooms, for "A married woman's body and soul should be essentially her own, and that can only be so if she has an inviolable retreat" (119–20). In the social sphere, she advises that "friends of all grades are needed as well as a mate" (164). Though she advocates that "the man and the woman should each be free to go unchallenged on solitary excursions...visits, week-ends or walking tours," she emphasizes to women specifically the need for freedom *outside the domestic sphere*: "To the realisation of the beauty and the enjoyment of solitude woman in general tends to be less awake than man...the claims of her children and of domestic

life have robbed her of nature's healing gift" (167).

Stopes's book contributed to the acceptance of respectable women as sexual and independent beings, but without the negative connotations of promiscuity or recklessness that would, in the 1920s, be associated with emancipated "flappers." In this way, her book was especially nonthreatening to male readers. *Married Love* circulated in such "male" domains as officer corps and men's clubs: Soloway notes that "In at least one prominent men's club demand for the book was so great that members could read it for only an hour at a time" (212). Of the thousands of letters to Stopes extant today, over 40 percent were written by men, with topics ranging from grateful thanks to anxious inquiries about impotence, masturbation, contraceptives, homosexuality, and prostitution.[7] Undoubtedly, *Married Love* was read partly because of its reputation as a titillating, even pornographic work, but it also played a significant role in shaping the sexual knowledge of male readers.

Although *Married Love* was the book that opened the floodgates for a new discourse on sexual pleasure in the late teens and early 1920s, the book and its knowledge was at first limited to the middle and upper classes who could afford to pay for it. Her books would gain a wider audience in time (Ruth Hall notes that "as her fame spread, Marie began to receive more letters from working-class women who had often clubbed together to buy her books" (*Passionate Crusader* 179)), but Stopes's views were not

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[7] See Lesley A. Hall's "Forbidden by God, Despised by Men: Masturbation, Medical Warnings, Moral Panic, and Manhood in Great Britain, 1850–1950," and especially her *Hidden Anxieties: Male Sexuality, 1900–1950*, which discusses the Stopes correspondence and quotes extensively letters Stopes received from men.

initially accessible to the working class except in her pamphlet *Letter to Working Mothers*, which discussed birth control rather than the more poetic sexual pleasures of *Married Love*. Clare Davey states correctly that working-class women were more likely to have heard of Stopes through the popular press, for example, in magazines, than through books such as *Married Love* (qtd. in Lesley Hall, "Uniting Sense and Sensibility," 265); most of the letters Stopes received from the working class referred to her pamphlet, her clinics, and to articles written by and about her in newspapers like *John Bull*.

In 1923 *Married Love*'s notoriety would be exploited in the marketing of a film called *Maisie's Marriage*, whose oblique message about birth control and its corollary, sexual happiness, relied on a prior, somewhat classed, knowledge of Stopes's works and of popular sexual discourses. Stopes was highly publicized as the main scriptwriter; the film was originally, provocatively titled *Married Love*. Annette Kuhn's discussion of *Maisie's Marriage* and its censorship emphasizes that the film's messages are somewhat class-specific, dependent on a "'truth' about sexual pleasure, about birth control, about married love" that was "not universally available in society" or "evenly distributed between the different classes" (90). In the film, which was actually penned by Stopes's co-writer Walter Summers and approved by her, a middle-class woman gives advice about family limitation and sexual fulfillment to Maisie, a young working-class woman who has refused an offer of marriage because she is worried about "children, children…we can't afford to clothe and keep them" (qtd. in Kuhn 84); eventually, the enlightened Maisie is happily reunited with her lover. *Maisie's Marriage* seems to

suggest that the middle classes might pass on valuable information about sex to the working classes in the way that Marie Stopes was doing, though the information is so coded that the film can hardly be considered didactic. In what is perhaps the most overt scene in the film, Mrs. Sterling uses a botanical metaphor taken from *Wise Parenthood* to describe how the wise man uses his knowledge of birth control to prevent having a large family of sickly, ill-supported children: "armed with knowledge he pruned his trees carefully" so that "each bud was cared for and nurtured, and though his roses were fewer, each bud had turned into a perfect flower" (qtd. in Kuhn 90). The metaphor is concretized in the sequence of images that these intertitles accompany, showing a pair of hands trimming an overgrown bush, then culminating in the "perfect flower" that dissolves into a baby's face.

Maisie's Marriage's difficulties with the British Board of Film Censors (BBFC) and the Home Office (the government department responsible for advising local licensing authorities on censorship issues) reflected certain fears surrounding sexual knowledge in the early 1920s. The Home Office assumed it was a "Birth control-Marie Stopes-propaganda film" (a memo from May 24, 1923, qtd. in Kuhn 79) that would spread ideas about birth control, a subject thought unsuitable for the film medium and its wide audience. However, the "message" is vague enough that it would have been most effective for those *already* aware of Stopes's birth control campaign and of her books; others might view it as a straightforward romance, though I have trouble believing that curious viewers of any class would remain completely ignorant for long. Posters capitalizing on the censorship, announcing, "What's in a Name? The Original Title of

our Film cannot be used by order of the Home Office: so ????? (CAN YOU GUESS?) will be shown as MAISIE'S MARRIAGE" (reproduced in Kuhn 82) with Stopes's name in large print below, could hardly have failed to pique the inquiring mind. More troublesome than the birth control "propaganda" itself was the link the film makes between birth control and sexual happiness (which Kuhn has noted was reflective of *Married Love*'s philosophy). Censors felt that birth control knowledge posed a threat to public morality if it led to sexual indulgence, particularly among the masses. In particular, Stopes's advocation of nonprocreative sexual pleasure might encourage women's sexuality; once freed from the burden of children, Maisie can indulge her "dim tremulous thoughts of waking womanhood" (qtd. in Kuhn 84).

Despite the threat of the censor, there was no escaping the new discourses of women's sexuality in the popular media, in newspapers, novels, and films. However sexual knowledge was acquired by the working classes, and whether or not it included an awareness of birth control, sexual pleasure as represented in cross-class popular culture in the 1920s would reflect these discourses that presented women's sexual fulfillment as acceptable and even necessary.

The Sheik

> Terror, agonising, soul-shaking terror such as she had never imagined, took hold of her. The flaming light of desire burning in his eyes turned her sick and faint. Her body throbbed with the consciousness of a knowledge that appalled her. She understood his purpose with a horror

> that made each separate nerve in her system shrink against the understanding that had come to her under the consuming fire of his ardent gaze.... (58)

Diana Mayo's knowledge of sex comes to her "under the consuming fire" of the Sheik's gaze; the scene is prelude to her rape. When confronted with the purple passages of submission and domination in E.M. Hull's[8] 1919 bestseller, one cannot argue that *The Sheik* is a not a tale of male sexual mastery. It very surely is: Ahmed repeatedly wields his power over Diana with his look (58, 88, 111, numerous other pages), his crushing of her wilful independence is repeatedly referred to as "taming" (113, metaphorized in his vicious breaking of a colt, 102–3), he humiliates her, demands her complete obedience to his orders, and treats her as his possession.

And yet, *The Sheik* may be seen as empowering the female reader, for Ahmed transforms from a sexual brute into a tender lover. Diana asks Raoul (Ahmed's friend, a writer and a French nobleman), "Do you think there really exists such a man as you have drawn—a man who could be as tender, as unselfish, as faithful as your hero?" (184), to which he replies, "I do know a man, who, given certain circumstances, has the ability to develop into such a character" (184). Obviously, it is Diana who effects Ahmed's character development; later, his new capacity for emotion, expressed in his love for her, can be seen as a reflection of her "feminine" power. Initially driven by physical desires and a stereotypically "male" need for conquest and domination, Ahmed becomes a feeling

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[8] E.M. Hull was the pseudonym for Edith Maud Winstanley. In addition to *The Sheik*, she wrote *The Shadow of the East* (1921), *The Desert Healer* (1923), and *The Sons of the Sheik* (1925). After a tour of Morocco, she also wrote a travel book called *Camping in the Sahara* (1926). See Melman.

man. As with category romance novels of today,[9] readers wanted this plot resolution, and got it: the eventual triumph of love. Hence, Ahmed begins to regret his cruelty to Diana (206); he longs to nurture and protect her, "to hold her in his arms, to kiss the tears from her eyes and the colour into her pale lips...to give his life to keep even a shadow from her path" (207). Ahmed's delirious soliloquy—given, appropriately, when he is near death and at his physical weakest—neatly sums up his transformation through the book. From the phrases, "You cannot get away, I shall not let you go" and "When will you learn that I am master?" to the beginning of self-awareness and questioning—"Why does it give me no pleasure to have broken her at last? Why do I want her still?"[10]—Ahmed progresses to explicit declarations of emotional needs: "How could I know that I should love you?...If you knew how much I love you...Diane, Diane...Diane, Diane..." (240). By the final scene, he succumbs completely to her, his emotional abandon matching hers; he speaks "brokenly," whispering "imploringly...words of passionate love" and "dropp[ing] to his knees beside her" (295).

Patricia Raub, in her article "Issues of Power and Passion in E.M. Hull's *The Sheik*," has already weighed the book's seemingly opposed agendas, preferring to see Diana as empowered rather than subjugated. Raub notes that "Diana is less powerless than she might seem" (125), since her alliance with Ahmed gives her power over his tribesmen that would otherwise be out of her reach. More importantly, Raub points out,

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[9] I use Carol Thurston's definitions of "category romance" as "genre or formula writing" and "series romances that are written to publisher-specified guildelines, packaged between covers that carry numbers and some kind of logo, all of which are issued together and in a given number at the same time each month" (32). See Thurston, *The Romance Revolution: Erotics for Women and the Quest for a New Sexual Identity*.

[10] The film version supplies the obvious answer, spoken by Raoul: "Because you love her."

unlike "deflowered" heroines before her, Diana is not ruined by Ahmed (122); instead, she is freed to respond sexually, "giving him kiss for kiss with an absolute abandon of all resistance" (Hull 148). Diana's enjoyment "of her lover's caresses suggests that she is more liberated than she seems at first glance" (Raub 125).

However, liberation implies that Diana consciously takes control, and she does not. She does make a choice to stay with Ahmed on her own terms, at the end of the book, but nowhere does she successfully take an active role in securing Ahmed's love. To her credit, she tries: after Diana realizes her love for him (the film bluntly adds a scene in which Diana writes, "Ahmed I love you" in the sand) she plots to use her sexual attraction to win his love, becoming aware of her beauty as a power rather than something "hateful" that "God curses her with" (185): "a wave of rebellion welled up in her...she would use every art that her beauty and her woman's instinct gave her...At no matter what cost she must make him care for her. Though she loathed the means she would make him love her" (193). Disappointingly, though, Diana never gets the chance to exercise even this ambiguous agency. Moments after these thoughts, she is kidnapped by Ibraheim Omair. Ahmed comes to realize his love for her not through any means of Diana's but through her absence: "The vacant room had brought home to him abruptly all that the girl meant to him" (201). Her worth is increased by the chance that he might lose her to a political and now romantic rival.

Ultimately, it is not Diana the character but the woman *reader*, *writer*, and *filmgoer* in the material world who is liberated by reading these steamy passages and creating a sex symbol in the figure of Rudolph Valentino, the star of *The Sheik*'s film

adaptation. Diana may not be active or liberated, but Hull-as-author might be; in giving Diana power over Ahmed at the end of the book, even if Ibraheim Omair and "male" competitiveness are the vehicles, Hull offers women the chance to identify with Diana's passions and share them vicariously, swooning to the Sheik's embraces and feeling satisfied at the end that love has conquered all. As with Lesley Hall's reading of *Married Love*, we can overlook the limits of the text to see its effects as a book, its possibilities for social change. The postwar working girl with disposable income and spare time was active in demanding leisure activities that pleased her. In choosing to buy books like *The Sheik*, through which they could treat themselves to an erotic and emotional fantasy, women readers became active participants in a woman-made market of desire, exercising both economic and sexual freedoms. These lowbrow "sex novels," as they were called, (see Melman, 41–51) were written mostly by women, for women, and cheap enough to be enjoyed by lower-middle class and working-class women. *The Sheik* cost 3s 6d when it was first published by Nash, but "spectacular sales...enabled the publishers to cut the price of a copy to 2s 6d, and a cheap edition eventually coast only 1s" (Melman 46–47). Films were also affordable across the classes, and working-class women could go to the cinema to indulge in escapist fantasies set in exotic locales. Even the highbrow film journal *Close Up*, started in 1927 by Winifred Bryher (with Kenneth McPherson as editor), would recognize the liberating aspects of filmgoing for working-class women. Dorothy Richardson's initial disgust at the garish "picture palaces" transforms into

sympathy when she observes the relief of the women in an audience on washing-day[11]:

> Their children were at school and their husbands were at work. It was a new audience, born within the last few months. Tired women, their faces sheened with toil, and small children, penned in semi-darkness and fouled air on a sunny afternoon. There was almost no talk. Many of the women sat alone, figures of weariness at rest. Watching these I took comfort. At last the world of entertainment had provided for a few pence, tea thrown in, a sanctuary for mothers, an escape from the everlasting qui vive into eternity on a Monday afternoon. ("Continuous Performance" 35)

Further, women could participate in these tales of passion without too much cost to their *moral* sensibilities. Certainly, *The Sheik* pushes limits as an erotic thriller that represents an English woman of "bon sang" (174) enjoying extramarital, nonprocreative sex with an exotic, "native" desert lover without a care for the consequences. Hull flaunts these details:

> Her heart was given for all time to the fierce desert man who was so different from all other men whom she had met, a lawless savage who had taken her to satisfy a passing fancy and who had treated her with merciless cruelty. He was a brute, but she loved him, loved him for his very brutality and superb animal strength. And he was an Arab! A man of

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[11] In 1932 Richardson would regret the passing of the silent film, which she saw as an "essentially feminine" medium in its "power to evoke, suggest, reflect, express from within its moving parts and in their totality of movement, something of the changeless being at the heart of all becoming..."; she felt that the rise of sound would enable a masculine "planful becoming" rather than a feminine "purposeful being" ("The Film Gone Male" 424).

> different race and colour, a native; Aubrey would indiscriminately class him as a "damned nigger." She did not care. (134)

To the 1920s female reader, the male "other" was attractive as an escapist fantasy that represented a departure not only from the ordinariness of England but from the ordinariness of English men who perhaps needed books like *Married Love* to please their wives—popular ideology constructed the Arab sheik as possessing an innate sensuality that made him a "naturally" passionate lover in contrast to European men. As Melman has noted, desert novels tend to portray "'Civilized' Englishmen and European men" as "pleasant but unexciting, and sexless, rather anaemic figures in comparison with the colourful, hot-blooded Arab or the European masquerading as an Arab" (Melman 101). *The Sheik* enforces these dual stereotypes by setting up Raoul (who is not English but is said to be "from her own world" (in the film) and "of her own order" (Hull 159)) as a foil for Ahmed:

> As they sat talking the contrast between the two men was strongly marked. Beside the Frenchman's thin, spare frame and pale face, which gave him an air of delicacy, the Sheik looked like a magnificent animal in superb condition, and his quiet repose accentuated the Vicomte's quick, nervous manner. (170)

Though both men fall in love with Diana, the choice is obvious: Diana feels affection for the well-mannered, tactful Raoul, but it is the sexualized, bestial presence of Ahmed that draws her as a lover.

However, despite its daring, *The Sheik* ultimately and neatly conforms to status

quo values. The consequences are erased, the fantasy made safe. Diana—and readers—are safely sanitized by the revelations at the end of the book: Diana discovers that Ahmed is not Arab after all but an English nobleman (his father being an English lord, though his mother was a Spanish lady), and their relationship is legitimized by the implied marriage at the end of the book ("you will have a devil for a husband" (296)). All fears of miscegenation are allayed, the delicate matters of sex with an *actual* Arab, Omair ("Was I—in time?" asks Ahmed after the rescue (265)) and out-of-wedlock pregnancy ("Good God! You don't mean—I haven't—You aren't" (290)) are swept away, and the reader has the best of both worlds: a steamy book with a bourgeois ending.

Female consumers were also to produce the cult of Valentino. The Hollywood silent film version of *The Sheik* (directed by George Melford, 1921) opened in London in January 1923.[12] It experienced great success as part of the rapidly growing leisure market that catered specifically to women's desire. As Miriam Hansen states in her article "Pleasure, Ambivalence, Identification: Valentino and Female Spectatorship":

> For the first time in film history, women spectators were perceived as a socially and economically significant group; female spectatorship was recognized as a mass phenomenon; and the films were explicitly addressed to a female spectator, regardless of the actual composition of the audience. (6)

The film's star, matinée idol Rudolph Valentino, was, onscreen and off, a "woman's man," having had a past as a paid dancing partner—a "lounge lizard"—before he began

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[12] This date comes from the *Times*' "Films of the Week" (January 24, 1923).

acting (Studlar "'Optic Intoxication'" 27, "Gender and Ethnicity" 33), and who contributed to this image by asserting in interviews the importance of men's attentiveness to women's pleasure (see Studlar, "Gender and Ethnicity," 27).[13] His appearance as Ahmed Ben Hassan in *The Sheik* caused women to faint in the aisles and started a craze for "Arab" fashions and motifs. Valentino's status as a sex object for women, what Gaylyn Studlar calls his "woman-made" masculinity (in "'Optic Intoxication'") threatened traditional constructions of masculinity in the U.S. and in Britain; Valentino's erotic appeal was decidedly effeminate as well as exotic, since he was not American or British but an Italian immigrant. The success of Valentino, a foppish "sheik" in long robes and makeup, selling beauty products across America ("Every man and woman should use Mineralava. I would not wish to be without it" ("Gender and Ethnicity," 32)), as a model of virile manhood complicated ideological gender binaries and deconstructed traditional notions of masculine sexuality. Was this what women wanted in a mate? While men fumed or fussed over powders and creams, women swooned. "Sheik" became a term to describe a man with sexual appeal.

The film medium made it possible to visually realize the book's elaborate costumes and settings, to make Valentino into an object of spectacle, and to bring to life the Sheik's mesmerizing gaze that "swept [Diana] until she felt that the boyish clothes that covered her slender limbs were stripped from her, leaving the beautiful body bare under his passionate stare" (57). Ahmed's stare in Hull's book is encoded as an

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[13] The marketing of Valentino as a "woman's man" is somewhat comparable to the marketing of romance novel cover-boy Fabio in the 1990s.

imposition of sexual knowledge, a metaphor for sexual domination and possession; his eyes force upon Diana the consciousness of herself as a sexual being. He looks "at her as no other man had ever dared to look, with appraising criticism that made her acutely conscious of her sex, that made her feel like a slave exposed for sale in a public market" (81).

Ahmed's "dark, passionate eyes" render Diana powerless, unable to turn away, but by the end of the book the transfer of power is apparent as Ahmed begs for recognition in Diana's eyes, pleading, "Diana, will you never look at me again?" (295). The same is true of the film, where Valentino, with his ridiculously bulging eyes, is both gazer *and* gazed-at. Valentino, not Agnes Ayres, is necessarily the figure of spectacle, the film aiming to titillate a female audience. Diana and the audience are positioned as viewers who affirm their own pleasure by looking at Ahmed/Valentino. *Close Up* took a step further the idea of film as a site of possible (though ambiguous) sexual affirmation for the woman viewer by publishing a poem that sexualized the film medium itself. H.D.'s "Projector" (1927) metaphorizes the film projector as a male lover who entraps the viewer's gaze with light. The audience is transfixed by "his rare power / he snares us in a net / of light / on woven / fair light…he turns our pain to bliss" (39) as Diana in the book is "trapped like a wild thing" in Ahmed's arms, "her wide eyes fixed on him, held against their will" (80). Once caught, though, neither's gazes remain "snared" or "trapped" by force, but perhaps by a sadomasochistic attraction. The imagined viewers of H.D.'s poem "worship" (40) the projector/lover, while Diana's eyes are "held" by her own curiosity; she is "Fascinated" by his "brown, handsome face with its flashing eyes,

straight, cruel mouth and strong chin" (Hull 80). "Projector" suggests that through spectatorship and vicarious identification—"Your souls upon the screen / live lives that might have been, / live lives that ever are"—female viewers (referred to as "you" by the projector/lover) become willing players in their seduction: "I call your spirit here, / I light you like a star, / I hail you as a child, / I claim you as a lover" (44).

Hansen has argued that "Valentino's appeal depends, to a large degree, on the manner in which he combines masculine control of the look with the feminine quality of 'to-be-looked-at-ness'" (12).[14] Surely, the feminization of Valentino facilitated his role as sex object for viewers who were used to seeing women through the lens of male desire, what Laura Mulvey calls the "masculinization" of the spectator position, but women's freedom to feel arousal in watching Valentino also goes beyond a "phallic identification" (qtd. in Hansen, 22) to, perhaps, a uniquely female gaze.

Women's vicarious pleasure in watching *The Sheik* goes beyond a simple reversal of the subject-object gaze. Various cross-dressings occur in the film that challenge pre-war notions of women's "place" as passive, demure innocents in the home. Women viewers who identified with Diana participated, by proxy, in the crossing of gender and racial boundaries, as Diana's changes of clothing give her the power of transgression through masquerade: in men's clothing she is able to take on the "male" privilege of independence; in her evening gown she exchanges a long first glance with her future lover ("You make a very charming boy, but it was not a boy I saw two nights ago in

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[14] Hansen's article offers a psychoanalytic discussion of a range of Valentino's films. She also discusses the possibility for a female gaze, and presents various modes of female viewer identification (using Mary Ann Doane's distinctions, 15–16) in the context of the films.

Biskra," says the Sheik later) and so takes a semi-active role in her own seduction; in the Arab dancer's costume she is able to enter the restricted space of the casino (a scene not in the book). Meanwhile, the representation of the virile man as an effeminate sheik (Valentino's later films included more nudity and increasingly effeminate costumes) challenged traditional notions of masculinity. The open space of the desert becomes a metaphorical "space" where transgressions can freely occur: here the Sheik is the "flapperrooster"[15] that signified the blurring of naturalized gender boundaries by confirming "the increasing effeminacy of men and the masculinity of women" (in Studlar, "Gender and Ethnicity," 25). Not only that, Diana's choice to remain in the desert and adopt "Arabian" customs rather than return to England signified a failure of the "regeneration" plot that might have been favoured by imperialists fearing England's decline into degeneracy. "Regeneration" implies that English civilization has become "stagnant, clogged, decadent," but "the vitality of the race could be renewed by journeys to the frontier" (Trotter 145).[16] In such a plot, Diana would either return to "decadent"

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[15] Freeman Tilden's article "Flapperdames and Flapperroosters" appeared in the American magazine *Ladies' Home Journal* (May 1923) and observes the "effeminate tendencies in American men who associated with flappers: 'Oh yes indeed! They have the same habitat and the same general characteristics as the old flappers of the once-called weaker sex and they are the deadliest of all. When a woman flaps, she flaps; but when a man flaps, he flops'" (qtd. in Studlar 17).

[16] See Trotter's article "Modernism and Empire: Reading *The Waste Land*":

> An apocalyptic view of history insisted that empires decay from the heart outwards, unless they can be reinvigorated by contact with the colonial periphery, the frontier-zone where civilisation meets barbarianism. The centre of the British Empiire had known civilisation for so long that it had lost its originating vigour....
>
> The Imperialists believed that the vitality of the race could be renewed by journeys to the frontier. Lord Curzon elaborated on this idea in the Romanes Lecture of 1907.... '...on the outskirts of the Empire, where the machine is relatively impotent and the individual is strong, is to be found an ennobling and invigorating stimulus for our youth, saving them alike from the corroding ease and the morbid excitements of Western civilisation.' Such was the Imperial rite of passage which promised to remove young men and women from a decadent society, and to bring out the best in them by giving them experience of life in the raw. (145–46)

civilization with heightened moral and nationalistic sensibilities, or at least find a mate (always a "pure" Englishman) and a home in the ennobled wilderness of a British colony, becoming the desexualized, androgynous heroine of the Empire romance.[17] Instead, Diana embraces the desert as a site of sexual freedom; she (presumably) never returns to England.

It is easy to see how "crossed" representations of feminine and masculine sexualities (the sexually liberated modern woman and the effeminate yet "manly" Arab lover) in mass culture markets of film and fiction were liberating for women consumers at the same time that they threatened the sexual identities of American and British men. As *Sheik* sequels and imitations appeared, some men simply joined the "sheik" bandwagon. The infamous "Pink Powder Puff" editorial in the July 18, 1926 *Chicago Tribune*, spurred by the sight of a powder vending machine in a public men's washroom, would lament the "Arabian" trends in men's fashion that encouraged "masculine cosmetics, sheiks, floppy pants and slave bracelets": "When will we be rid of all these effeminate youths, pomaded, powdered, bejeweled and bedizened, in the image of Rudy, that painted pansy?" (qtd. in Botham and Donnelly 195–96[18]; qtd. in Katz 1401). Others vocalized their anxieties about desert-love books and films in articles (both serious and satirical), burlesques, parodies, and cartoons that appeared in British mass newspapers such as the

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[17] See Melman, chapter 9, "The Emigrant: Romance and the Empire," for a discussion of Empire romances.

[18] Noel Botham and Peter Donnelly's exposé, *Valentino: The Love God* (1976), is useful, though sensational and decidedly unscholarly (the back cover reads, "*Was* he The Great Lover—off screen? Or was he just a jumped-up gigolo? *What* was the taunt that haunted him to the grave? *And why* did people claim he had been murdered—shot or poisoned? Now these questions are answered by two top Fleet Street journalists who have talked in Hollywood to the people who knew the world's first superstar intimately"). It contains excerpts from the "Pink Powder Puff" editorial and from Valentino's book of sentimental poems, called *Day Dreams* (1923).

Daily Mail and the *Daily Express*. Valentino's attitude towards his own image was defensive. In an interview with *Colliers* (US) in January of 1926, he is quoted as saying, "I had to pose as a sheik for five years!" though he adds that "I am sure I will be able to live down the past" (qtd. in Studlar, "Gender and Ethnicity" 30); when the "Pink Powder Puff" editorial appeared, he took it as a personal affront to his manhood, challenging the writer of the article to a boxing match.

Melman suggests that sex novels were threatening to men because they were written, for the most part, by and for women[19]; many articles attacked the sex novel as pornography "manufactured by female writers for the consumption of sex-starved female readers" (92). On November 29, 1927, the *Daily Express* in England printed a particularly vicious editorial from the puritanical James Douglas that attacked sex novels, sex novelists, and sex films alike. Douglas's language was much more offensive than anything to be found in the texts he so denounced:

> Mimes, Cads, Bounders, Sniggerers, Innuendoists, Pornocrats, Garbage Mongers, Purveyors of Pruriency, Vendors of Vice, Sewer Rats, Carrion Crows, Maggots of Decadence, Hookworms of Salacity, Literary Lepers and Yahoos; You are one of the ten plagues let loose upon us by the war.... You have turned marriage into a mockery. You have glorified lust and lechery. You have made the world safe for pornocracy.... Sex novels, sex plays, and sex films are a marketable commodity.... Not long ago I retched over a novel by a female procuress which explored abysmal

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[19] A notable exception is Michael Arlen's bestselling *The Green Hat* (1924).

> horrors that hitherto have been the monopoly of psychoanalysis. Sweet girl graduates read it and discuss its esoteric abnormalities and fetid mysteries.... (qtd. in Melman 44)

The corruption of "sweet girl graduates" was particularly worrisome; at a time when Victorian beliefs in the incompatibility of intellect and motherhood were still in circulation, "girl graduates" were not only failing their duties to the country but upholding a degenerate female "pornocracy." Douglas and others seem most threatened by the fact that women were active in producing and buying material that was considered autoerotic and which affirmed their sexual drives, confirming popular sexual discourses (e.g., as in *Married Love*) that claimed such drives were autonomous of male sexuality. Even more galling, the "desert love" genre portrayed the male ethnic "other" as intrinsically sexier than men at home!

Both *Married Love* and *The Sheik* are admittedly limited in their visions of female pleasure (Stopes's book limits its audience to those legitimately married, while Hull's book requires the Sheik's brutal conquest of Diana to "awaken" her sexually), but still offered to women a new sexual freedom as desiring subjects. *Married Love* and *The Sheik* also proved to be significant texts in men's lives, despite the traditional view of self-help books and romance novels as women's genres: *Married Love* offered guidance and encouragement to husbands and wives alike, while *The Sheik* challenged prescribed gender roles and opened possibilities for redefining masculine and feminine sexualities, particularly in its film form.

In spite of the importance of lowbrow genres in shaping popular discourses of

sexuality, most early twentieth-century British highbrow critics condemned popular literature and judged film, especially Hollywood film, quite harshly. While anxious males denigrated sex films as part of a female "pornocracy," the intellectual elite denigrated the film medium itself (with a few exceptions, such as Chaplin films) as entertainment made for the characteristically indiscriminate "mass"; Peter Stead notes that in the 1920s "it became a socially respectable and intellectual orthodoxy to relate the worthlessness of the movies to the immaturity of the masses" (37).[20] As film was increasingly recognized as a culturally legitimate medium, however, the avant-garde *Close Up* took a divergent stance by arguing for film as a universalizing space that brought affordable pleasure to intellectuals and the masses, men and women and children alike. Dorothy Richardson's "Continuous Performance" article of December 1927 proclaims that the "starveling," the "pleasant intellectual," the "Happy youth, happy childhood, weary women of all classes for whom at home there is no resting place," "sensitives," "elders," and the "stone-deaf" come to the cinema as a "Refuge, trysting-place, village pump, stimulant, shelter from rain and cold at less than the price of an

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[20] See Stead's discussion of intellectual reactions to film in *Film and the Working Class: The Feature Film in British and American Society*, particularly chapter 2, "Towards Significance in the Silent Era." In reality, readers of the *Daily Express* were not quite as ignorant as Stead's highbrow critics supposed. A quick look at the *Express*'s frequent cinema articles and reviews shows that even in 1918, articles appeared that suggested the existence of a discriminating public. "Public Opinion in the Cinema: Should Audiences Boo Bad Films?" (November 7, 1918) reads, "Many producers and exhibitors seem to be under the impression that cinema goers are an unintelligent body, for whom anything will suffice. This mistaken idea probably survives only because in the case of the silent drama, so it is called, the audience express neither approval or disapproval of the fare provided...." Another article, "The 'Movies': Most Popular Items in a Cinema Programme" (July 5, 1918), claims that "the educated cinema public" prefers Mary Pickford and Charlie Chaplin, beginning, "Once cowboys from the Bad Lands and lamentable comedians hitting one another on the head with heavy hammers furnished most of the drama and comedy of the cinema theatre, and people were as ashamed of going into a picture house as of reading a penny horrible or a boys' comic in public. Times have changed, and fortunately the films with them."

evening's light and fire, drunkenness at less than the price of a drink" ("The Increasing Congregation" 61). Through the knowledge and experiences imparted by film men and women become "world citizens," not just "local quality" (July 1928, "The Cinema in Arcady" 57). Richardson's view of film as an art appealing to a universal audience was exceptional; continuing concerns with keeping popular culture and high culture separated suggest that elite culture remained fiercely guarded.

3

Battling "Pornocracy": Censorship and the Obscene Novel in the 1920s

In the *Daily Express* of November 29, 1927, James Douglas[1] gave a venomous diatribe against the writers of "sex novels, sex plays, and sex films" that addressed issues of women's sexuality and represented women as sexually desiring subjects. "I am afraid," he wrote scornfully, "that no pestologist will exterminate you before you have completed your corruption of defenseless youth and your mercenary demobilisation of the English novel" (qtd. in Melman 44). Douglas's concern was twofold: that texts with sexual themes led to a decline in public morality, and that the popular sex novelists constituted a "pornocracy" (44) responsible for the general decline of English literature. The "pestologist" was the censor, including critics like Douglas himself, customs officials who prevented banned books from entering the country, and purity groups such as the National Vigilance Association that brought "obscene" books to the attention of police and pressured libraries to ban books from circulation.

In his scathing editorials, Douglas attacked not only popular novels but higher-brow literature as well, often with harsh consequences for the book concerned. He pronounced James Joyce's *Ulysses* "the most infamously obscene book in ancient or modern literature" (qtd. in Murphy 25), while his denunciations of D.H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow* and Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* are well-known for contributing to

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[1] Douglas, editor of the *Sunday Express*, was known for his puritanical editorials that reviled, in addition to popular novels, bare-backed dresses and jazz dancing. See James McMillan, ed., *The Way It Was, 1914–1934*, 145–46.

their legal suppression. In contrast, bestselling sex novels by writers like E.M. Hull, Ethel M. Dell, and Elinor Glyn were condemned but, significantly, never censored to the same degree.

Obscenity Law and the Modernist Work

In early twentieth-century England, the banning of "obscene" books occurred under the threat of the Obscene Publications Act of 1857. Douglas's anxiety about corruption and easy access conforms basically to the definitions of obscenity that were given by the Hicklin Doctrine of 1868 (described below) and enforced through the Act. In the nineteenth century, obscene libel in England was a common law offense, which meant that the terms of the law were vague—based on tradition and recorded precedents rather than an Act of Parliament—and therefore difficult to enforce. The law aimed to regulate "pornography" such as "ancient bawdy broadsheets, French and Egyptian postcards, salacious cullings from the classics sold in penny-part editions" (Saunders 156), not "reputable literature," but even its efforts to stem the flourishing pornography trade on Holywell Street, Wych Street, and Fleet Street in London were ineffective, as it could not endanger the "liberty of the subject which surrounds the administration of the common law. Further, stocks could not be seized, and even if a shopkeeper was successfully prosecuted and imprisoned, his wife would often continue the business until he was at liberty to resume it" (Craig, *Banned Books* 22).

The 1857 Obscene Publications Act (also called Lord Campbell's Act, after the Lord Chief Justice at that time) focussed on limiting sales and circulation of "obscene"

works and gave the police the legal power to routinely search for suspicious materials, seize them, and, if the materials were found obscene under the existing law of obscene libel, destroy them. The power of judgement lay entirely in the hands of the police and the magistrates, and it was up to the bookseller or publisher to produce before the magistrate a reason why the material should not be destroyed, or why the material could not be considered obscene. The Act was introduced in England by Lord Campbell, whose experiences judging pornography cases had prompted his campaign to rid Holywell Street of pornographers and make it "the abode of honest, industrious handicraftsmen and a thoroughfare through which any modest woman might pass" (Campbell qtd. in Hunter et al 63). Two cases in 1857 had especially disturbed him: William Dugdale's trial for selling prints considered to be obscene and William Strange's trial for selling the periodicals *Paul Pry* and *Women of London*, which Campbell examined and deemed "most infamous" (qtd. in Thomas 261). Campbell credited the Society for the Suppression of Vice for their contribution to the closing of thirty-seven shops selling pornography but noted that twenty more were still running; the Act allowed them to be dealt with more strictly. Predictably, although Holywell Street seemed at first "transformed" by the new, stricter policing of "obscene" materials, it was only a matter of time before *Saturday Review* (December 5, 1868) reported, "the dunghill is in full heat, seething and steaming with all of its old pestilence" (qtd. in Thomas 263)

Ian Hunter, David Saunders, and Dugald Williamson, in their study *On Pornography: Literature, Sexuality and Obscenity Law*, note that in the nineteenth century, "regulatory milieus" such as "public health, education, welfare, domestic

economy" formed "a broad network of social policing," which brought together the law (judges like Lord Campbell) and society (reformers like Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell who believed that "vicious literature" did "permanent and incalculable injury" to young minds (qtd. 13))[2] in "common concern" against the perceived harms of "cheap auto-erotic literature" (60). Initially, the law of obscene libel considered published material to be obscene on the basis of two criteria: material was deemed obscene if its purpose was to (1) shame a public figure through sexual or scatalogical imagery, or (2) serve the private function of sexual arousal. From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, however, obscene libel favoured the "private" definition, and with the rise of mass literacy, the expanding market for printed publications, and the fear of children's masturbation, the concern rose that certain kinds of literature could constitute a social harm by corrupting individual minds and, by extension, bodies. D.H. Lawrence wrote in 1929 that

> ...the late British Home secretary, who prides himself on being a very sincere Puritan, grey, grey in every fibre, said with indignant sorrow in one of his outbursts on improper books: 'and these two young people, who had been perfectly pure up till that time, after reading this book went and had sexual intercourse together!!!' *One up to them* is all we can answer.
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> ("Pornography and Obscenity" 12)

Sexual language could lead to sexual acts: touching, intercourse, or worse, masturbation. As Hunter et al point out, "in the context of the great anti-masturbation campaigns

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[2] See Blackwell's *Counsel to Parents: On the Moral Education of Their Children in Relation to Sex* (1879), qtd. in Hunter et al 12–13.

directed at the bourgeois family...the failure to resist the incitements of erotic words and images became intelligible in terms of a general debilitation of body and soul" (65).

In this light, obscene texts were typically metaphorized as "poison." Lord Campbell, for example, "had learned with horror and alarm that a sale of poison more deadly than prussic acid, strychnine or arsenic—the sale of obscene publications and indecent books—was openly going on" (*Parliamentary Debates*, 1857, qtd. in Hunter et al 65). Blackwell wrote in *Counsel to Parents: On the Moral Education of Their Children in Relation to Sex* (1879) that "the really poisonous character of all licentious literature, whether ancient or modern" had a "destructive effect on the quality of the brain" (qtd. in Hunter et al 13). Decades later, James Douglas would echo Campbell and Blackwell's concerns that obscene literature could endanger public health; in his *Sunday Express* article that opened obscenity proceedings in 1928 for Radclyffe Hall's lesbian novel *The Well of Loneliness*, he declared, "I would rather put a phial of prussic acid in the hands of a healthy girl or boy than the book in question" (qtd. in Gilmore 612).

Despite Lord Campbell's assertions that the Act was passed in order to police "works written for the single *purpose* of corrupting the morals of youth and of a nature *calculated* to shock the common feelings of decency in a well-regulated mind" (*Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 1857, qtd. in Hunter et al 60, my italics), the law was actually not so concerned with the *intention* of literature but its possibly harmful *effects*, as Leigh Gilmore has noted in an essay that discusses the *Well of Loneliness* trial. "Obscene" texts were seen as corruptive because they could incite readers to "immoral" thoughts or activities. Gilmore notes that the Obscene Publications Act did not try to argue for a

text's intrinsic obscenity but targeted its extrinsic, potentially corruptive effect on society:

> In the absence of a legal definition of what obscenity *is*, obscenity's criminality exists wholly in relation to what it *threatens*...the absence of a definition of what the law purportedly seeks to control—the production, circulation, and profit in obscene materials—lays bare obscenity's role as a legal form of social control. (606, my emphasis)

Obscene texts were seen as threatening to public morality, particularly when they fell into the hands of "defenseless youth," as Campbell, Blackwell, and Douglas feared. H.G. Wells's *Ann Veronica* (1909) was banned by the Hull Public Libraries Committee in 1910 after the National Vigilance Association's Canon Lambert said he would "as soon send a daughter of his to a house infected with diptheria or typhoid" (qtd. in Trotter 204) than give her the offending book. In September 1921, a reviewer in *John Bull* declared that Lawrence's *Women in Love* was "the sort of book which in the hands of a boy in his teens might pave the way to unspeakable moral disaster...If *The Rainbow* was an indecent book this later production is an obscene abomination. The police must act" (qtd. in Farmer et al liii). The concept of obscenity aimed to protect "susceptible" members of the population from sexually suggestive material and in doing so created a demographic category of literate but undiscriminating people, what M.J.D. Roberts, in his article "Blasphemy, Obscenity and the Courts," calls the "culturally vulnerable" (143).[3] The groups considered to be in greatest danger of being corrupted by obscene works were

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[3] See Roberts, who writes, "As the market for printed publications expanded and diversified, it became a matter of urgency to reconcile the liberties of the culturally trustworthy with the perceived needs of the culturally vulnerable" (143).

children, women (particularly lower-class women), and young men (Gilmore 613). At the trial for Radclyffe Hall's lesbian novel *The Well of Loneliness* in 1928, the attorney general singled out the phrase "And that night they were not divided" (referring to Stephen and Mary's sexual union) and asked, "Imagine a poor woman or young man reading it? What is the picture conjured up at once?" (qtd. in Gilman 613).

The Hicklin Doctrine of 1868 had made the definition of offence more specific regarding these "susceptible" groups. The Hicklin judgement emerged from a case over the obscenity of a pamphlet called *The Confessional Unmasked: Showing the Depravity of the Romish Priesthood, the Iniquity of the Confessional, and the Questions Put to Females in Confession*. Copies had been purchased by the Protestant Electoral Union,[4] seized from the Wolverhampton home of one of its members, Henry Scott (who intended to circulate them), and ordered destroyed after inspection by Benjamin Hicklin and other local justices. Despite an appeal by Scott, the original destruction order was upheld by the Court of Queen's Bench. The pamphlet, which had circulated since 1836, contained a preface in which the editor "attacked Catholic practices and beliefs" and stated his intentions "'to shew into what minute and disgusting details these holy men have entered. This alone has been my object, and not the filling of the work with obscenity'" (qtd. in Hunter et al 67). Although *The Confessional Unmasked* (supposedly) had a moral objective to expose what it saw as vice in the Catholic church, the pamphlet was still viewed as obscene. In Regina v. Hicklin, a "test for obscenity" was established by Lord

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[4] The Protestant Electoral Union was "a society committed to protect the Protestant tradition and to resist Catholicism in England" (Hunter et al 67). See Hunter et al, which provides a good account of the Regina v. Hicklin case (66–73).

Campbell's successor, Sir Alexander Cockburn:

> I think the test of obscenity is this, whether the tendency of the matter charged as obscenity is to deprave and corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influences, and into whose hands a publication of this sort may fall. (Regina v. Hicklin, qtd. in Hunter et al 66)

Campbell had been careful to note that the Obscene Publications Act of 1857 was directed at "European pornography" (Gilmore), not "literature" or "art" (Thomas 262). But the Hicklin judgement of 1868 saw as the conditions for obscenity (1) the work's tendency to "deprave and corrupt" and (2) the possibility that (to use Roberts's term again) "culturally vulnerable" minds might be exposed to the harmful influence of such a work, regardless of authorial intention, intended audience, or intellectual "merit." An obvious problem arises: can a work of literature with no *purpose* to corrupt or to offend "common decency" still have such an *effect*? After all, as Gilmore notes, the Act failed to "define obscenity, prohibit specific representations, or take into account authorial intention"; what it did was regulate circulation of materials to "protect audiences for whom the materials were most probably not intended or likely to reach, but who might be influenced by them" (606). Thus, Hicklin paved the way for the suppression of "highbrow" works that were written for entirely different audiences than those of the street pornography sold on Holywell or the "penny dreadfuls" that were sometimes seized under the Obscene Publications Act. Such works included Charles Knowlton's birth

control tract *Fruits of Philosophy*[5] (published 1834, publishers Annie Besant and Charles Bradlaugh tried in 1877) and psychological/medical books like Havelock Ellis's *Sexual Inversion* (published 1897, bookseller George Bedborough tried in 1898; publisher de Villiers committed suicide before he could be charged). Fiction was also targeted: Henry Vizetelly was tried in 1888 and 1889 for publishing and circulating English translations of Zola and Maupassant.[6] Initial criticisms of Campbell's Act—that it could be used to suppress works of importance and merit—were becoming more relevant as the twentieth century approached. In its classification of texts as "obscene," the Act often "wrenched books out of context" (Gilmore 607).[7]

The threat of prosecution posed by the Obscene Publications Act of 1857 and the Hicklin Doctrine was to have a profound effect on the writing, publication, and distribution of twentieth-century works like Joyce's *Ulysses*, Lawrence's *The Rainbow* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, and Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*, all of which were suppressed, if not legally banned, in England. Although it was the publishers and printers, not the authors, who faced prosecution and punishment in the form of fines or

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[5] Knowlton's book was feared to promote sexual licentiousness "not by arousing their [readers'] passions but by removing the fear of pregnancy" (Thomas 266).

[6] See Donald Thomas, *A Long Time Burning: The History of Literary Censorship in England*, 266–70.

[7] It took the Obscene Publications Act of 1959 to finally make amendments to the old act. The 1959 Act altered the Hicklin judgement of 1868 by comprising a new test for obscenity that took into regard the literary merit, on the whole, of a work:

> An article shall be deemed to be obscene if its effect or (where the article comprises two or more distinct items) is, *if taken as a whole*, such as tend to deprave and corrupt persons who are likely, *having regard to all relevant circumstances*, to read, see, or hear the matter contained or embodied in it. (in Hyde 11, Hyde's emphasis)

The work had to be proved to exist for the public good "on the grounds that it is in the interests of science, literature, art or learning, or other objects of general concern" (Obscene Publications Act 1959, qtd. in Hunter 147). Also, the "opinion of experts" regarding these merits was finally admitted to proceedings under the new Act. The amendment allowed *The Well of Loneliness* and the unexpurgated *Lady Chatterley's Lover* to be retried and brought back from the dead.

imprisonment, writers were usually confronted by wary publishers and editors who would avoid the risk of obscenity charges under the Act by simply refusing to publish anything potentially obscene, or by limiting the print run and circulation of the work.

Writers were further deterred by financial liabilities. If the work was published and found to be obscene afterwards, the writer faced loss of revenue through pirated editions if he or she didn't republish the work in an expurgated form. *Ulysses*, for example, originally published by Shakespeare and Company in Paris but not copyrighted in the United States due to its banning in England and the U.S., was pirated by Samuel Roth in New York, first in a bowdlerized serial form from July 1926 to October 1927, then in book form, not proofread and with "thousands of errors" (Groden, "Textual History" 107–8). *Lady Chatterley's Lover* faced similar problems with piracy after it was published privately outside England, "without legal protection of its copyright" (Squires xxviii). Marie Stopes also points out in her discussion of stage and print censorship[8] in *A Banned Play and a Preface on the Censorship* (1926) that "publishers almost universally make authors sign a clause financially guaranteeing the publisher against the costs of prosecutions or legal actions and the losses involved in them" (42–43). In the face of such threats, writers often self-censored or were asked by publishers to censor their work; Lawrence's work, especially, suffered from censorship at the writing stage. Many books did not reach the publication stage without significant revisions, and even after publication might be suppressed by the publisher if hostile reviews appeared, without

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[8] Stopes points out in *A Banned Play* that many writers did not write for the stage because censorship of drama was more strict than censorship of printed works. It was generally felt that visual representations were more likely to sway audiences than words on the page.

ever reaching the courts.

The ban of Joyce's *Ulysses* in the United States was enough to necessitate its suppression in England. Though never legally tried in England, the circulation of *Ulysses* in its book form would be discouraged under the Customs Act of 1867 (Craig, *Suppressed Books* 78) as a result of *Ulysses*' obscenity trial in the States, where it had been serialized in New York's *Little Review* magazine. Between March 1918 and December 1920, fourteen episodes (from "Telemachus" to "Oxen of the Sun") appeared in the *Little Review*, in spite of warnings from Ezra Pound (the magazine's foreign editor) and lawyer John Quinn that a legal suppression of one part could "impede the publication of the work as a whole" and that "in book form the total context could more easily justify specific passages" (Ellmann, "*Ulysses*: A Short History" 711–12). Three episodes—"Lestrygonians" in January 1919, "Scylla and Charybdis" in May 1919, and "Cyclops" in January 1920)—were confiscated and burned by the U.S. postal authorities, and in 1920 John Sumner, secretary of New York's Society for the Suppression of Vice, launched a formal complaint against the "Nausicäa" episode that had appeared in the July/August issue of that year. The offensive passages describe Gerty MacDowell as she indulges Bloom's voyeuristic desires, slowly revealing her knickers as rockets rise phallically into the background and explode into a fireworks display. Jane Anderson and Margaret Heap, the magazine's publishers, were brought to trial on February 14, 1921; they lost the case, the main objection being "too frank expression concerning women's dress when the woman was in the clothes described" (Fitch 76). Anderson and Heap were enraged at John Quinn's defense, which they felt failed to "attack the concept of

obscenity" and which discredited the book as "unintelligible" and "eliciting only anger and hostility," not desire (Groden, "A Textual and Publishing History" 97). Though they would have preferred to go to jail, Quinn convinced the judge to reduce the penalty to a fine of fifty dollars each and prohibition from publishing further episodes of *Ulysses* in the *Little Review*.

As the *Ulysses* trial showed, ideologies that positioned women as innocents susceptible to the corrupting effects of obscene language and sexual content informed both American obscenity law and English law. In his biography of Joyce, Ellmann notes that as the questionable passages from "Nausicäa" were to be read aloud, "One judge urged that they should not be read in the presence of Miss Anderson.... 'I am sure she didn't know the significance of what she was publishing'" (503). The judge's patronizing assumption of Anderson's ignorance and his superficial characterization of her as "beautiful and innocent-looking" (Anderson qtd. in Groden 97) subscribed to the notion that women were too innocent to recognize obscene language, while failing to acknowledge that the law was so vague that both men and women had difficulties recognizing what it deemed "obscene." When John Quinn told Anderson to "For God's sake don't publish any more obscene literature," her question "How am I to know when it's obscene?" was met with his nonplussed response, "I'm sure I don't know, but don't do it" (Ellmann, *James Joyce* 503).

Ironically, considering the groups that obscenity law aimed to protect, *Ulysses*' early publishers who met with the brunt of the censorship were all women. In England, Harriet Weaver, after initial difficulties finding a printer who would risk the legal

liabilities setting material that might be found "objectionable to the authorities" (Beach 46), managed to publish *only* parts of "Nestor," "Proteus," "Hades," and "Wandering Rocks" for five issues of her magazine *The Egoist* between January and December of 1919 (Groden 95; Brown 253). The printer for *The Egoist*, W. Lewis, wrote a letter to Weaver that "described Joyce's writings as blasphemous and vulgar and complained to Harriet Weaver of the time wasted by his press reader in looking through *Ulysses*" and eventually refused to print any more of *The Egoist* (Brown 253). Sylvia Beach, who ran a bookshop and lending library in Paris, observed that "Miss Weaver…sacrificed the review. The *Egoist* review turned into the Egoist Press, 'overnight,' as she expressed it" (46). Disappointingly, Weaver's persistent attempts to publish *Ulysses* as a book also failed as news of the American trial reached printers in England. It was Beach's Shakespeare and Company in Paris that finally published *Ulysses* in book form on June 2, 1922, printed by Maurice Darantière, whose French-speaking typesetters could not read what they were setting or know whether or not it was obscene.

Circulation of *Ulysses* in England had to operate clandestinely. Ellmann notes that tourists "began to bulge at bodice or waist as they smuggled it past the British and American Customs officials, who relieved them of it when they noticed it" (Introduction xix); Sylvia Beach apparently "warned American and English publishers to place the book in another dust jacket," such as *Shakespeare's Works, Complete in One Volume* or *Merry Tales for Little Folks* (Fitch 119). When Harriet Weaver at last managed to publish the first English edition (and second impression) of 2000 numbered copies in October 1922, under the Egoist Press imprint and again using Darantière in Paris as a

printer, bookshops in London sold the book under the counter, while 400 copies were destroyed by the New York postal authorities. Inevitably, a copy was seized at Croyden airport in London and declared obscene, and when a third impression of 500 copies was printed in January 1923, one copy was sent to London while 499 were confiscated at Folkestone on its way into England from Paris and allegedly burned in the "'King's Chimney,' as the official incinerator was called" (Fitch 138). According to Weaver, *Ulysses* was then banned from publication in England (qtd. in Ellmann, *James Joyce* 506). Shakespeare and Company resumed publication of *Ulysses* in Paris, and, in 1930, Odyssey Press in Germany took over. It was not until 1936 that *Ulysses* could be published again in England (by The Bodley Head), after it was retried and officially admitted into the United States in 1933. Judge John M. Woolsey found it unarousing to "a person with average sex instincts," declaring that "whilst in many places the effect of 'Ulysses' on the reader undoubtedly is somewhat emetic, nowhere does it tend to be an aphrodisiac" (United States v. *Ulysses*)![9]

D.H. Lawrence's interest in the "sex instincts," not surprisingly, made him a prime target for censors, as Richard Grant has detailed in his article, "D.H. Lawrence: A Suitable Case for Censorship." Having over the years convinced himself of the rightness of his vision—"writing honestly about sexual matters," as Grant summarizes it—Lawrence suffered from the restrictions of censorship law at the levels of writing

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[9] See Woolsey's Opinion A. 110–59, United States of America, Libellant v. One Book Called *Ulysses* Random House, Inc., Claimant, reprinted in *The United States of America v. One Book Entitled* Ulysses *by James Joyce: Documents and Commentary—A Fifty-Year Retrospective*, ed. Michael Moscato and Leslie Le Blanc, 308–12.

(self-censorship), publication, and circulation. Most of Lawrence's troubles followed the "banning" of *The Rainbow*, which was published by Methuen in September of 1915. Police took notice of *The Rainbow* after two hostile articles were published in October, one in the *Sphere* on October 22 by Clement Shorter that declared, "the whole book is an orgie of sexiness," and that unless the publishers "hold the view that Lesbianism is a fit subject for family fiction I imagine that they will regret this venture" (104). The other, by James Douglas, appeared in the *Star* on October 22 and claimed that *The Rainbow* failed to fulfill what Douglas perceived as the artist's responsibility to present life as "beautiful" rather than a "frightful reality"; consequently, "There is no doubt that a book of this kind has no right to exist. It is a deliberate denial of the soul that leavens matter. These people are not human beings. They are creatures who are immeasurably lower than the lowest animal in the zoo.... The sanitary inspector of literature must notify it [sic] and call for its isolation" (4). In November the publishers were summoned under Lord Campbell's Obscene Publications Act to give a defense for why the book should not be destroyed as obscene. The fear of raising negative publicity was such that Methuen gave no defense and simply pleaded guilty, turning all the copies over to the police. Their actions did an injustice to Lawrence, who, in the absence of a proper trial, could not even appeal the decision.

Lawrence thought that *Women in Love*'s difficulties with publication had to do with *The Rainbow*'s suppression, probably rightly, considering how it had apparently "led to a panic among printers and created an oppressive wave of censorship" (Meyers qtd. in Grant 205). Published in the United States in 1920 and in England in June 1921, *Women*

in Love suffered at the hands of its publisher, Martin Secker, whose fears of censorship and libel charges had led him to excise entire paragraphs containing sexual meaning, homosexual overtones[10] or potentially libellous representations of real people. Lawrence complied with many of Secker's suggestions, though some alterations were made without Lawrence's permission.

Lawrence found himself stymied by the libraries as well as his cautious publisher. Circulating/ subscription libraries (Mudie's W.H. Smith, and Boots Booklovers Library, whose mostly middle-class subscribers paid an annual fee) and public libraries (catering to the working class)[11] held a great deal of power over the publishing industry; their refusal to carry a book greatly reduced access to the work and severely hampered revenues to the publisher and writer. The Circulating Libraries Association began making its own censorship decisions in December 1909, after pressure from the National Vigilance Association. As for the public libraries, Q.D. Leavis's 1932 analysis of popular reading habits *Fiction and the Reading Public* would observe that "highbrow" works failed to circulate in the public libraries both because of their unpopularity with the reading masses and because some of these writers were considered "indecent":

> The fiction shelves of a public library commonly contain the classics and hardy popular novels of the past, representative works of all the most popular contemporary novelists, and (more rarely) the 'literary' novels of

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[10] In the novel's early stages, Lawrence himself omitted a prologue that establishes a homosexual relationship between Gerald and Birkin.

[11] See McAleer for a discussion of the development of libraries in Britain during this period and its relevance to popular literature.

> the age, but seldom what is considered by the critical majority to be the significant work in fiction—the novels of D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, T.F. Powys, and E.M. Forster. Apart from the fact that three out of the five are held by the majority to be indecent, a fact suggestive in itself, four out of the five would convey very little, if anything, to the merely literate. (Leavis 5)

In a footnote, Leavis adds that "The head of a big public library (and in a University town), when asked why there were no novels by D.H. Lawrence on the shelves, replied indignantly: 'I've always tried to keep this library *clean*'" (274).

In 1912 Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*, which had been drastically cut by Edward Garnett (reader for Duckworth), though judiciously and "not on moralistic grounds," had some trouble with libraries that prompted Lawrence to complain, "The damned prigs in the libraries and bookshops daren't handle me because they pretend they are delicate skinned and I am hot. May they fry in hell" (qtd. in Grant 204). Often, Lawrence was pressed to expurgate his own work in order to preserve his career. In 1920 Lawrence's publisher Martin Secker advised him to cut *The Lost Girl*, warning him "that the lending libraries had refused to handle the book unless the accounts of the sexual encounter between Ciccio and Alvina were rewritten…the sale of 2000 copies was at stake" (J.T. Boulton et al, qtd. in Grant 207). In December of 1921, Secker suggested in a letter to Lawrence that the already-revised *Women in Love* would have to undergo further "excisions or paraphrases" to "aim at full circulation"; otherwise, it would "be sold only in booksellers' shops," for the libraries would find it unacceptable. Secker made clear

that "to cut out the libraries, I shall only print 1500 copies" with a corresponding reduction to Lawrence's advance (Secker qtd. in Grant 206; Farmer et al xlvii–xlviii). *Women in Love* was eventually published with a print run of 1500, after Secker admitted that "it was impossible to expurgate the text to the Mudie-Boots level" (Farmer et al xlviii). By examining Lawrence's letters, Grant has shown that Lawrence's attitude wavered between contempt for his censors and almost meek compliance with them in the face of financial loss and cultural illegitimacy.

When *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was ready for publication, Lawrence wisely chose to have it privately published by Orioli in 1928 in Florence, where, as with *Ulysses*, the typesetters could not read the English they were setting. Copies were sent to subscribers in England, where Richard Aldington and other friends of Lawrence took over the distribution. "Most of the copies reached their destinations," notes Hyde, though "faint-hearted booksellers cancelled their subscriptions" (7). When customs officials finally began to seize *Lady Chatterley* at English ports in January of 1929, they were only able to get the last few copies, and Lawrence had already claimed his royalties. Reviewers who managed to acquire copies were generally hostile. An unsigned comment in the October 20, 1928 *John Bull*, entitled "Famous Novelist's Shameful Book," states, "*Lady Chatterley's Lover* defies reproduction in any manner whatsoever that would convey to our readers the abysm of filth into which Mr. D.H. Lawrence has descended," deeming it worse than the "sewers of French pornography…The creations of muddy-minded perverts, peddled in the back-street bookstalls of Paris are prudish by comparison" (11). In contrast, higher-brow periodicals such as *Adelphi* (review by Lawrence's friend John

Middleton Murry, June 1929) reacted with praise and sympathy. When the expurgated British edition was published in 1932, V.S. Pritchett in *Fortnightly Review* (April 1, 1932) condemned censors for making it "difficult to see Lawrence whole and to put all those silly charges of pornography in their place"; that is, the "obscene" passages should be seen in their proper context, with "serious works and works of art" (536–37). Pritchett probably overestimated public reverence for the "work of art"; even hostile reviewers admitted to Lawrence's genius but continued to denounce him as immoral.

Under Hicklin, judges did not look favourably on "literary merit" as a defense against obscenity. Marie Stopes in 1926 (following the banning of her play *Vectia*[12] from the stage) agreed that "the public should be protected" from "the pornographer," but asserted that "the prophet" must be protected from the censor (44). She suggested, perhaps naively, that a jury of "twelve literary men" [sic] from organizations such as the Royal Society of Literature and the Members of the British Academy might be given the right to veto bannings as a solution ("A Simple Way Out") to the Pornography vs. Art debate:

> For the 'prophets' and *serious* writers an appeal from the Lord Chamberlain's veto must be devised. I suggest the easiest and safest way to do this would be as follows. If a serious play is banned by the Lord Chamberlain, its author should have the right to obtain, if he can, an unanimously signed and written statement by any twelve authors of

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[12] Stopes's *Vectia* was written in 1923 and based on her first marriage to Reginald Ruggles Gates ("William Rees" in the play), her discovery of his impotence, and her determination to divorce him on the grounds that their marriage had never been consummated.

> recognised standing that his play should be licensed, and that then the Lord Chamberlain should be *bound* to license that play. The Lord Chamberlain personally would then be absolved from any responsibility in licensing something of which he disapproves, because the twelve literary men should be looked upon as something in the nature of a jury to whose verdict he has to bow, as does a judge in the High Court bow to the verdict of the twelve plain men who form the jury, whatever the judge may privately think of the prisoner in the dock. (45)

Stopes's idea was not a novel one. Appeals to "merit" in court were sometimes attempted and usually met with failure. At the U.S. trial (1920) that resulted in the banning of *Ulysses*, John Quinn had presented three intellectuals as witnesses, Scofield Thayer (editor of the *Dial*), Philip Moeller of the Theatre Guild, and Cambridge-educated novelist John Cowper Powys (Ellmann, *James Joyce* 503). At the 1928 *Well of Loneliness* trial of the publisher, Jonathan Cape, "experts" keen on defending the book for its contribution to literature and society (if not its artistic merit[13]) were poorly received. All forty witnesses who had come to vouch for the not-obscene status of *The Well*, among them Vera Brittain, E.M. Forster, Virginia and Leonard Woolf, were met with hostility by the magistrate Sir Charles Biron, who asked, "How can the opinion of a number of people be evidence?" (qtd. in Thomas 305)[14] and insisted, "I don't think

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[13] Virginia Woolf thought *The Well of Loneliness* was socially important but artistically unimpressive. In a letter to Lady Ottoline Morrell dated November 1928, Woolf wrote, "The dulness of the book is such that any indecency may lurk there—one simply can't keep one's eyes on the page" (qtd. in Flint 122).

[14] Although I use Thomas as a source, I have been careful to check his research against other sources. Thomas seems misinformed in his assertion that "Jonathan Cape was about to publish [*The Well of Loneliness*] in 1928 but withdrew [it] after seeking Home Office advice as to the likelihood of a

people are entitled to express what is merely an opinion upon a matter which is a decision for the court…I reject them all" (Craig, *Banned Books* 38).

Leigh Gilmore notes that "Attorneys, publishers, and authors" called for an "operative distinction between texts possessing and lacking literary merit," but

> …when such a distinction was finally admitted, it was defined by judges who decided for themselves the probable overall effect of a text. 'Experts,' however, were generally barred from giving testimony. …the legal expert pre-empted the literary expert and authored the language of obscenity law. (607)

After all, the law aimed to protect the morally wayward public, not literary experts who were viewed as either not "susceptible" or already "corrupt." What made the *Well of Loneliness* case particularly indefensible was that its merits were themselves objectionable to the law. "The very reasons for which some supported the book"—"its potential to win greater tolerance" for homosexuality (or "inversion," after Havelock Ellis)—could also be construed legally as its tendency to corrupt" (Gilmore 612). After its initial suppression, *The Well of Loneliness* followed the example of *Ulysses* and went to Paris; there the Pegasus Press published "'a replica of the original London edition...without the alteration of so much as a comma.' ...[I]n little over a month after the book's initial suppression, 'a steady flow of copies began crossing the Channel'" (Pegasus Press publicity circular, qtd. in Rolley 220).

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prosecution" (305). All my other sources, including the current Virago edition of *The Well of Loneliness*, indicate that *The Well* was indeed published by Jonathan Cape in 1928.

Censorship and the Lowbrow Work

James Douglas was concerned that sex writers were employing a "mercenary demobilisation of the English novel"—that is, sex novels were debasing "the English novel" as a respectable institution—but his participation in the banning of Lawrence and Hall's work indicates that his concept of "the English novel" was based on moral standards, not intellectual or artistic ones. For Douglas, "the English novel" did not mean "highbrow" or even "classic," perhaps, but conformed more closely to Gilbert Frankau's definition of "fine books" as respecting a patriotic duty to be "comprehensible and entertaining and uplifting to the vast majority of his fellow-countrymen and countrywomen" (qtd. in Leonard Woolf 7), in short, wholesome and morally edifying. For Douglas, the role of the "pestologist" was to eliminate those writers who in representing sexual desire "have transformed sex into a synonym for sensuality, so that this once honest word is now a lewd leer reeking of lubricity" (qtd. in Melman 44); a stricter censorship might resurrect the demobilised "English novel."

Despite his contempt for sex novels, however, Douglas is most often cited for his role in the banning of modernist works. Why were such "highbrow" works more likely to face legal censorship than obviously "lowbrow" ones like E.M. Hull's *The Sheik*, which *The Literary Review* had deemed "poisonously salacious in conception" (qtd. in Raub 126), the protagonist "a sister under the skin of [de Sade's] Justine" (qtd. in Melman 90)? "Sex novels," which James Douglas equated with the "pornography" that Campbell's Obscene Publications Act aimed to eradicate, were in a much better position to "corrupt,"

being cheap, easily accessible to the "culturally vulnerable" masses (Roberts 143), and easy to read. As we have seen, the same metaphors of disease and "poison" used to deride Victorian pornography and the cheaply-priced "sex novels" and "desert-love novels" of the early century were used against works written by self-defined intellectuals like Wells and Lawrence, yet evidence suggests that the "sex novels" of writers like Hull, Ethel M. Dell, and Elinor Glyn,[15] which sold in large quantities, were not censored to the same degree. For example, neither *The Sheik* or Glyn's scandalous *Three Weeks* (which was banned in some schools) were tried for obscenity or legally banned from circulation or publication in England.[16]

In contrast to Douglas, Rebecca West, in her essay "The Tosh Horse" (which appeared in *The New Statesman* around 1925),[17] criticizes censorship's suppression of the "serious English writer," a title she clearly invokes in terms of artistic merit as she laments the banning of Lawrence's "sincere and not for one second disgusting *The Rainbow*," Neil Lyons's "beautifully felt *Cottage Pie*," (withdrawn by the Circulating

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[15] Hull wrote novels in the "desert-love" genre, set in a fictionalized Sahara and featuring steamy sex with exotic male lovers. See my second chapter, "The Significance of Popular Sexual Knowledges for Women's Agency," for a discussion of Hull's *The Sheik*. Ethel M. Dell's novels (she wrote 40) balked at premarital sex but were heavy in violence. Dell was particularly fond of whippings—"her descriptions of whippings are intimate, frequent, and told with relish" (Penelope Dell 62)—to which heroes and heroines both succumb. Elinor Glyn, who was the most publicity-conscious of the three (and, judging from photographs, the most glamourous), is best known for her bestseller *Three Weeks* (1907), one of the early sex novels, in which a lusty "Queen" seduces her young male lover on a tiger skin and conceives a child out of wedlock. A Hollywood film version appeared in 1923, directed by Alan Crosland, with Glyn as directorial advisor.

[16] In North America, *Three Weeks* was "banned in Boston, and for a time in Canada" (Fowler 114). It also faced a rather mild threat of legal suppression in 1915, when Glyn sued Weston Feature Film Company for violating her copyright in filming *Pimple's Three Weeks (Without the Option)*, a loud parody of the novel. She lost the case, the judge stating that "to a book of such cruelly destructive tendency no protection will be extended by a Court of Equity. It rests with others to determine whether such a work ought not to be altogether suppressed" (qtd. in Hardwick 199–200; Thomas 269–70).

[17] This is Penelope Dell's approximate date (79), from her 1977 biography of Ethel M. Dell and Ethel's sister Ella, *Nettie and Sissie*.

Libraries in February 1911), and Louis Wilkinson's *Brute Gods*, the work of a "unique talent" (324). Although condemnatory of censorship in general ("God forbid that any book should be banned. The practice is as indefensible as infanticide"), she is particularly cynical about the double standard practiced by the law, which with its "simple and stupid views of public morality and the decency imposed upon the printed word" (324–25) suppresses these works as "immoral" while overlooking the sadomasochistic and erotic aspects of popular novels like Ethel Dell's half-million-copy bestseller *Charles Rex* (1922). A sight that "must fill the heart of any serious English writer with wistfulness," writes West, is "when he gazes across the esplanade of any watering-place and looks at the old ladies reading their Ethel Dells" (325).

West only hints at a reason for the censor's bias against the highbrow in her characterization of bestsellers as "tosh"[18] that mixes "sincerity and vitality" (321), "innocence and idiocy" (323), using the metaphor of horseback-riding to evoke the abandoned sensationalism, fantasy and melodrama produced by popular novelists. In particular, West remarks wryly that Ethel M. Dell "Rides the Tosh-horse hell-for-leather. Positively at the most thrilling moments…one feels as if one might be ridden down" (323). She asserts that bestsellers are written without thought, sincere in their lack of self-consciousness:

> No one can write a best-seller by taking thought. The slightest bit of insincerity blurs its appeal. The writer who keeps his tongue in his cheek,

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[18] Dell's biography quotes Ella's comment that Dell's books were "awful tosh, and not in very good taste" (80).

> who knows that he is writing for fools and that, therefore, he had better write like a fool may make a respectable living out of serials and novelettes; but he will never make the vast, the blaring, half a million success. (320–21)

West echoes the sentiments of Virginia Woolf, a firmly self-defined "highbrow,"[19] whose essay "Bad Writers" from the *Times Literary Supplement* of November 21, 1918, states, "bad literature possesses…the quality of unfettered imagination. Bad books are written in a state of boiling passion, with a complete certainty of inspiration…. The process is not one of thought but one of intuition…." (328). It is possible that censors took bestselling literature less seriously because it was written by "fools," or because popular books tended to be ephemeral; they may also have been suspicious of "intellectual" literature because they did not understand it but could easily isolate "obscene" words and phrases for condemnation. Yet one would think that these are reasons why censors concerned about public morals might *target* lowbrow literature: a constantly renewed stream of sex novels that were easily understood by the masses, cheaply priced, and which appealed to the emotions and fantasy rather than the intellect.

Marie Stopes suggested that censors' appeals to the moral code might actually conceal a discomfort with the disruption of gendered sexual codes. In *A Banned Play and a Preface on the Censorship* Stopes argues that the "social moral code" is "man-made" and "based on the acceptance as 'normal' of masculine over-sexuality and callous dominance and feminine frigidity" (7–9). Many popular novels like Glyn's *Three Weeks*

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[19] See Woolf's essay "Middlebrow."

(1907) and *Six Days* (1924) challenged accepted sexual codes by depicting sexually aware—even aggressive, though never promiscuous—women, as did novels like Wells's *Ann Veronica*, censored for portraying a "woman making advances to a man" (Trotter 201), and Stopes's play *Vectia*, with its "'normally sexed'" (11) female protagonist. But popular novelists rarely went so far as to address impotence and masturbation, as Stopes did in *Vectia*. If libidinous heroines were met with hostility from the mostly male censors, representations of impotent men could be perceived as a direct challenge to male sexuality, and thus were even more likely to create anxiety. Stopes indignantly argues that "there is no over-sexuality, no mistress, no wanton, no illegitimate child, no impropriety" in *Vectia*—in short, nothing immoral—but the play is considered "improper" because of "the under-sexuality of a man.... The play shows a woman who is simple, pure, and normally sexed, and a man who is futile and weak as a result of the poisoning of his youth, and for *that* reason the Lord Chamberlain feels that the whole of public opinion will be behind him when he bans it!" (11). The play implicitly blames the impotence of Vectia's husband William on masturbation (and also, perhaps, on homosexuality), leaving key phrases unspoken:

> HERON: Yes, it's damned hard on you *now* when it's too late to alter. Poor devil! I suppose you're another product of—
>
> WILLIAM (*quickly*): I've done no wrong. Till I married Vectia I had never touched a woman—
>
> HERON: (*with scorn*) *Women!* Bah!—they're not the only—
>
> WILLIAM: I— (*shamed...*) (134)

While depictions of sexually liberated women and virile sheiks fuelled the insecurities of English males, *Vectia*'s censors may have been particularly sensitive to the threats to masculinity posed by Stopes's pathologizing of masturbation. Although by the 1920s sex educators tended to present male masturbation as more of a "bad habit" than a vice (as Lesley Hall notes, "Forbidden by God" 386), it was still believed by many to cause nervousness and impotence, if not mental disorders like insanity and idiocy.[20] Hall also observes that masturbation was thought by some to result from homosexual experimentation during one's schooldays ("Forbidden by God" 374), as might be the case with *Vectia*'s William. It is possible that *Vectia*'s oblique references to masturbation caused its suppression as much as its depiction of an impotent man. Censors' appeal to the "moral code" generally masked the fear of masturbation, whether as it is represented in the work in question, or as it might manifest in the reader's autoerotic pleasure from reading "indecent" passages. One might note that although *Ulysses* presents Bloom as an impotent cuckold and sexualizes Molly, it was the "Nausicäa" episode in which Bloom masturbates on a beach that finally led to *Ulysses*'s banning, allegedly because the description of Gerty McDowell's undress is considered indecent but not because Bloom fondles himself while watching her.

In his well-known "Pornography and Obscenity" pamphlet of 1929, D.H. Lawrence blatantly vocalized what Douglas only implied in his invective against the

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[20] See Lesley Hall's "Forbidden by God, Despised By Men" for a discussion of "warning literature" aimed at parents and children that cautioned against the dangers of masturbation. Hall also discusses the more tolerant views toward masturbation in the 1920s, though she adds that anxiety about the subject still persists, noting, "sex educators of the 1980s found boys believing that masturbation could cause impotence" (386).

"pornocrats" writing sex novels, sex films, and sex plays: that participation in these forms of popular culture amounted to autoerotic pleasure and led to masturbation for both sexes, which Lawrence contemptuously dubbed the "dirty little secret." Lawrence conflates pornography with popular culture by defining both as causes of masturbation: "The pornography of the rubber-goods shop or the pornography of the popular novel, film, and play, is an invariable stimulant to the vice of self abuse, onanism, masturbation, call it what you will" (178). Although he does not name "It,"[21] Elinor Glyn's popular euphemism for sex appeal, he confirms for novels and films what one reviewer said in 1927 about plays, that "There was not one theatre success since the war which did not enjoy what is predominantly described today as *It*" (qtd. in Melman 44). Lawrence observes that "half the love novels and half the love-films to-day depend entirely for their success on the secret rubbing of the dirty little secret..." (177), adding:

> The mass of our popular literature, the bulk of our popular amusements just exist to provoke masturbation...the one thoroughly secret act of the human being, more secret even than excrementation. It is the one functional result of sex-secrecy, and it is stimulated and provoked by our glorious popular literature of pretty pornography, which rubs on the dirty little secret without letting you know what is happening. (178)

Lawrence's complaint was that "pornography"—whether in the form of postcards or

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[21] Glyn had coined the term in her novels and in her story "It," written for *Cosmopolitan* magazine (US) in 1926. Described there as a "strange magnetism, mysterious and quite unbiddable" (qtd. in Fowler 118), "It" would be personified for Glyn in the flapperlike figure of Clara Bow, the brash and openly promiscuous actress who starred in Glyn's biggest Hollywood success, *It* (Hardwick 263).

popular culture, whether intentionally arousing or not ("I am sure…the authoress of *The Sheik* did not have any deliberate intention to stimulate sex feelings in the reader" (174))—degraded the "warm, natural flow" of "sex stimulus," "the human body," and "the sexual act" (174–75) by encouraging the "secretive, furtive" (177) practice of masturbation. Considering Lawrence's openness about sexual matters, his hostile attitude towards masturbation is oddly conservative, reflecting his idiosyncrasies about "the right sort" of sexuality: "There's nothing wrong with sexual feelings in themselves, so long as they are straightforward and not sneaking or sly" (174).

Possibly, the law's bias against highbrow texts indicates what Lawrence sees as "perpetual censorship of anything that would militate against the lie of purity and the dirty little secret, and perpetual encouragement of what may be called permissible pornography" (186). Lawrence suggests that hypocritical censors made an overt disavowal of sex as "immoral" but covertly condoned masturbation by failing to suppress sex novels and sex films, creating a culture of "permissible pornography" or "pretty pornography":

> So the cheap and popular modern love-novel and love-film flourishes and is even praised by moral guardians, because you get the sneaking thrill fumbling under all the purity of dainty underclothes, without one single gross word to let you know what is happening…. (178)

Lawrence is only partially correct. As newspaper editorials show, the "moral guardians" did *not* praise the sex novel or the "close-up kisses on the film" ("Pornography" 187), although it is true that while they derided these genres in theory, they often did not

suppress them in practice. Further, although many sex novels were coded about the sex act (Elinor Glyn used her famous asterisks to pull the curtain on amorous lovers, while Ethel M. Dell's consummations occurred behind closed doors), they still contained a good amount of scorching lips, strong arms, and heaving bosoms that "let you know what is happening"; in short, they may not have been very explicit, but erotic bodies were certainly present.

If, as Lawrence suggests, the "moral guardians" condoned masturbation, it was unintentional. Their lack of censorious action toward the sex-novel, sex-film, and sex-play may have stemmed from an unconscious desire to mollify the masses with harmless, critically-unengaging material while paying lip service to the "moral code." After all, the content of these popular texts ultimately did not threaten dominant ideologies. Sexual contact ended in heterosexual marriage, and plots closed cleanly and happily. Also, it is true that there were no "gross words"; such recognizable "obscenities" as crass language and explicit references to sexual organs, sexual activity, or excretory functions did not appear in these novels as they did in *Ulysses* or *Lady Chatterley*. Although according to obscenity law any kind of sexual content could have corruptive effects, the censors may have been particularly biased against modernist works, in which sexual content more often deviated from the norm and might promote "perverse" thoughts and actions.

The novels of Joyce, Lawrence, and Hall were banned as "obscene" because they challenged gender stereotypes, used crass language and descriptive sexual language, and subverted heterosexual norms. Both *The Rainbow* and *The Well of Loneliness*, for example, contain lesbian themes: the chapter "Shame" from *The Rainbow* describes

Ursula Brangwen's desire for Winifred Inger and includes a passage in which the two women embrace in the nude, while *The Well of Loneliness* explores—with probably more reticence towards sex than the average sex novel—the doomed relationship between Stephen Gordon, an "invert," and her lover Mary Llewellyn. In contrast, "deviant" sexual behavior such as masturbation or homosexuality seldom appeared in popular novels, except covertly or by accident. David Trotter observes that Christopher St. John's *Hungerheart*, published by Methuen in 1915, was not censored, despite the fact that it "is about a woman who loves and lives with other women" but "doesn't contain any lesbian bodies or lesbian bathing scenes…there is no lesbian text, only a lesbian context, in the minds of her readers" (*English Novel* 205). Violence and sadomasochism, on the other hand, was often permissible: Penelope Dell, Ethel M. Dell's adopted niece and biographer, notes that in Ethel M. Dell's *Charles Rex*, "a supposed cabin 'boy'"—really a girl in disguise—"is both beaten and fondled by Charles Rex"(79), but asserts that Dell's suggestion of homosexuality is unintentional.

Censorship generally works against itself. Any attempt to suppress a work generates public interest in it; as a result, censorship has the opposite effect of proliferating a work and increasing its appeal to the mass public that the censors aim to protect. The censorship of highbrow works often served as a catalyst for their appeal to a lowbrow audience. Both *Ulysses* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* appeared in pirated editions that capitalized on their reputations as "obscene" literature. One cheaply packaged, pirated edition of *Ulysses*, the 1960s Collector's Publications edition in California, was a photofacsimile of the Bodley Head edition that included "a hundred

pages of advertisements for other items from the Collector's Publications catalogue," such as sexual aids and books with titles like *The Incestual Triangle*, *Four Way Swappers* and *Whips Incorporated* (Groden, "Textual History" 108; Bishop 45). *The Well of Loneliness* had also been intended for a higher-brow audience: Porter and Hall note that *The Well* had

> ...initially been published in a highly priced limited edition and sent for review only to the 'reputable and serious sections of the press', in which it had received 'amazing sympathy and understanding.' Nonetheless it was in a second printing (and displayed in W.H. Smith's window), when the 'hysterical commands of a rag...well known for engineering stunts' for the Home Office to suppress it drew the attention of a wider public, and made it the book most in demand in circulating libraries, until its condemnation for obscenity in a court of law. (263–64)

The discourses of censorship themselves amounted to an act of proliferation. I would concur with Annette Kuhn's observation that "censorship operates not only prohibitively—in the regulation of a public sphere of discussion—but also productively—in the actual creation of such a sphere" (96). Ironically, as with the innuendo-filled parodies and vicious denunciations of the lowbrow desert-love novels, the articles and derogatory comments printed in the mass newspapers were sometimes more offensive than the books in question. They were also more likely to fall into the very hands that obscenity law tried to protect, due to the large circulation of newspapers and magazines. Of the *Well of Loneliness* controversy, a correspondent for the

progressive *Time and Tide* felt that the effects of the "nauseous details, discussions and suggestions" in the newspapers were "far more harmful than anything in the well-written book itself.... I defy any young girl or boy to remain ignorant of certain facts which ordinarily would never have come to their notice" (qtd. in Rolley 220). In this light, a more perceptive James Douglas might have been ashamed of his own complicity in the "pornocracy."

Conclusion

Most lowbrow works published in the early twentieth century are no longer in print, and, as I discovered during my research, many are difficult to find in libraries. Even Stopes's marriage manuals, still in print in the 1950s and still (I suspect) possessing some relevant advice, have not made it into the later century. Meanwhile, in spite of their sometime "obscene" status, Joyce and Lawrence are now firmly-canonized literary figures, suggesting that some highbrow works do rise to "classic" status over time while lowbrow works, for the most part, satisfy their readers and soon disappear from the market.

The exceptions to this generalization seem to be popular novels that achieve bestseller status and, decades later, find new life reprinted as "classic" pulp fiction, a category that by definition blurs the line between "high" and "low"; the time lag that consecrates highbrow works and makes "classics" of them sometimes accords "classic" value to the lowbrow as well. To my surprise, both Ethel M. Dell's *Charles Rex* and E.M. Hull's *The Sheik* were in print as recently as the early 1980s as part of a series entitled *Barbara Cartland's Library of Love*, published by Duckworth in Britain and Bantam in the United States; *The Sheik* was also reprinted in 1982 by Chivers Press as a "Lythway Classic Romance" (Lythway Press revived out-of-print popular novels from the early century and marketed them as nostalgia items for older readers). The continued existence of a market for these works, even if they were no longer widely read, suggests that some aspects of popular fiction retain their appeal over time even as social and

sexual codes change. For example, reading *The Sheik* today would be considered by few to be liberating, and in the 1990s we are more inclined to view the "desert love" themes and characters as stereotypes, but the fact remains that these familiar elements satisfy readers' expectations. Beautiful, feisty heroines awaiting ravishment by "exotic," brutish (yet tender) lovers in fantasized geographical/historical settings are common in mainstream romance novels of today. Even Barbara Cartland, whose traditional-style romance novels feature virginal protagonists and their wealthy, high-born suitors, continues to write according to the same formula she claims to have copied from Ethel M. Dell in the 1920s (see Cloud 23). Although the market for traditional romance novels is small, particularly in North America, Cartland still possesses a readership.

Very recently, the flourishing interest in women's history and cultural studies seems to have prompted the reappearance of *The Sheik*, Ethel M. Dell's *The Way of an Eagle*, and Elinor Glyn's *Three Weeks*, republished and repackaged in 1996 by Virago Press as "Modern Classics" with the addition of short critical introductions. The Virago editions are perhaps as close as these novels will ever get to highbrow consecration. Even the contemporary popular press is finding interest in these writers: in its November issue of 1996, the Canadian magazine *Saturday Night* printed a feature article on Elinor Glyn, in which Marian Fowler presents her as a vintage "sex goddess" (114) presaging Marilyn Monroe and Madonna. "Vintage" pulp is clearly finding new markets.

Still, a Valentino revival is unlikely. And the novels of Dell, Hull, and Glyn, which were "tosh" then, remain "tosh" now. The field of cultural studies, which has taken the popular fiction genres of the early century and swept them into the field of

highbrow study, nevertheless accords recognition to these works as sociological artifacts reflecting and affecting the attitudes and anxieties of an age, less so as individual, intrinsically valuable works of art. One studies *The Sheik*, for example, to gauge the sex novel's effect on gender roles in society, not for its textual complexities. Even in terms of social impact, though, popular culture has a difficult time being taken seriously as a transformative power, despite its large audience. As we have seen, obscenity law's dismissal of sex novels, its lack of interest in suppressing them, suggests that the law did not find popular literature transgressive or subversive, but ultimately harmless. As well, in spite of their obvious significance in shaping popular sexual knowledges, the genres of popular film and literature have tended to be overlooked by intellectual communities in favor of highbrow modernist works, in the early century as well as now. The academic interest in women writers still has not extended far enough into popular fields like journalism, romance writing, and magazine writing, genres which nevertheless—as with "mass" culture in general—have been gendered traditionally as female. These genres deserve better attention.

What I hope I have shown is that the growth of the lowbrow reading masses in Britain, the popularity of sex manuals and sex novels, the blurring of gender boundaries represented by the "flapper" and the "sheik," all amounted to disturbances to the ideological order in the 1920s, provoking anxieties among the intelligentsia, English males, and "moral guardians" like James Douglas. Popular culture's power to transform society in the 1920s, though admittedly limited, was still significant, challenging some sexual codes and bringing women's sexuality into public discourse. Although the

popular works that I address here have drifted unpredictably in and out of print or disappeared entirely, I believe their impact on English and American culture in the twentieth century has remained.

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